The Qur'ānic Concept of History

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ISLAMABAD — PAKISTAN

1975

CHAPTER I

QUR'ĀN AND HISTORICAL CHANGE

Historical Process not neutral

The Qur'ān lays great emphasis on the fact that the process of history is not neutral in respect of nations and communities for it says clearly, "God is on the side of those who fear Him and do good" (XVI : 127). The fear of God denotes the fear not of His person but of the law of divine retribution which governs the process of history, so that if a community or nation is conscious that this law is operative in so far as its collective existence is concerned and is, at the same time, virtuous in its conduct towards its own members as well as those outside its fold, it can rely on divine support in its struggle against hostile forces. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,[1] fear of God is the respect which people show for the commands of God, while 'doing good' means the kindness and benevolence which marks the conduct of good people towards their fellow men. In this connection al-Rāzī quotes some Muslim mystics who have declared that "the perfection of the path (to spiritual progress) lies in one's sincerity to truth and kindness to God's creatures".

Although al-Rāzī construes 'fear of God' and 'goodness' in the individual sense, the Qur'ān plainly uses these terms in the context of the struggle between the Muslims and the disbelievers of Mecca. The verse should, there-

fore, be understood in the historical context in which it was revealed. So understood, it establishes that virtue, justice, fair dealing and other qualities which lead to the betterment of human relationship help crown human effort with success both in the individual and the collective spheres of conduct, and it may be safely predicted that the group which embodies these qualities in the greatest measure will be in an advantageous position, if it comes into conflict with them; and further, if such a group comes to power and is able to set up a state of its own, that state would exemplify in the conduct of its affairs the qualities of benevolence and kindness to which al-Rāzī refers in his remarks on the above verse.

On the other hand, the Qur'ān makes it clear that wrong-doing of any kind is not conducive to the success or prosperity of any group of men. The historical process defeats the purposes of the wrong-doers. "And when Abraham was tried with certain commands by his Lord, he fulfilled them. Wherefore, God said to him: I am about to make thee a leader of men. Abraham said, but what about my progeny? God replied: My covenant does not include the wrong-doers" (II : 124).[2]

Some of the Muslim commentators state that the great majority of the jurists and *mutakallimūn* (scholastics) have concluded from this verse that it is not permissible to vest (political) power or leadership in any sinful person or persons so long as they remain in a state of sin. The *Shī'ah* have construed this verse in favour of the correctness of their stand in regard to the necessity of the *Imām* (ruler) or political authority, being infallible. But the majority of the Muslims hold that it is not necessary to probe into the inner motives of those who hold political authority whether they are rulers or judges. It is sufficient if they are able to

dispense justice among men and if their moral conduct, as judged by the people at large, is beyond reproach.

However, whatever the views of the Muslim jurists and the *mutakallimūn* this verse is equally applicable to the leadership collectively exercised by one nation over the others. Interpreted in this sense, it would mean that God does not entrust the leadership of mankind to a people who are ethically inferior and cannot maintain justice either among themselves or in relation to others. This is because the historical process is an ethically oriented one, and, therefore, does not allow to come on top or rise to the position of leadership a group of a people that does not fulfil even the minimum requirements of justice, fairplay and honesty in dealings with others. This principle does not apply to the transitory success which may come to the peoples or nations armed with material power only, who destroy some existing culture without being able to replace it by another. An Attila or a Chingez may succeed temporarily against a decadent polity but his success is generally short-lived. Such figures play only a negative role in history.

It should be noted, however, that moral virtues spring from some world-view and the ideals that are its products, and they can sustain themselves only by the strength they derive from that world-view. The religious world-view is the most potent factor that sustains morality, for it is not merely an intellectual world-view but also something which springs from the soul of man and, therefore, is not subject to periodic fluctuations. Morality, that is merely the result of social conditions, lacks this element of stability, because it can break under any strain and consists mostly in its conformity to the existing social standards.

Selectivity of the Historical Process

The Qur'ān clearly views the historical process as selective in the sense that it sifts those who are morally unfit from those who can function effectively as the standard-bearers of culture and civilization in the moral and spiritual sense of the word. The Qur'ān illustrates this by an example drawn from natural occurrences. "He sendeth down water from the sky so that rivers flow according to their measure and the flood beareth (on its surface) swelling foam—from that which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools riseth a foam unto like it—thus Allāh coineth a similitude of what is true and false. Then, as for the foam, it passeth away as scum upon the bank and as for that which benefits mankind, it stays on the earth" (XIII : 17).

Here, the Qur'ān is stressing the preservative force inherent in truth and the ephemeral nature of that which is untrue. The latter passes away as scum upon water but the former continues to influence the course of history. The historical process is, therefore, selective in so far as it tends to preserve what is of value to mankind, but allows everything else to perish. Truths, it ought to be remembered, are values and the higher and more comprehensive a system of truth the more valuable it is for mankind. Individual and isolated truths do not mean much, for there may be complementary truths without which isolated truths may become devoid of value. In short, the Qur'ān is referring here to the value aspect of truth, as it exhibits itself in the process of history. However, it is necessary to bear in mind, first, that while every truth has a value aspect, every value is not necessarily a truth; secondly, the Qur'ān is not taking a narrowly utilitarian view of the factors that shape history, because there may be immediate utility in something which is ultimately harmful

to the true interests of society. The Qur'ān always stresses the ultimate in comparison with the immediate values. History is not governed by factors, personal or impersonal, which are of immediate utility to society but by forces, internal or external, which have a more permanent utility. In this sense the Qur'ān claims for itself a utility and a value which is both continuing and imperishable. This is the interpretation of above verse by a classical Muslim commentator[3] of the Qur'ān. He says that God sent down from the heaven of glory and beneficence the water which is the Qur'ān. The valleys (rivers) mentioned are the hearts (understanding) of the people. God has compared the heart to the valley (river) because it is the heart which retains the illumination and enlightenment that comes from the knowledge of the Qur'ān just as valleys (rivers) retain the waters that pour down from the sky. Similarly, every heart received illumination from the knowledge of the Qur'ān in proportion to its purity, piety and the power of understanding things....Further, doubts arise in regard to the statements of the Qur'ān but they are at last cleared up, so that knowledge, religion and wisdom alone remain with the people.

The Qur'ān further points out that the forces of history move in such a manner as to sift the morally good from those who are evil-minded. "Allāh will not leave the believers in the condition in which they are until He separates the evil-doers from those who are virtuous" (III:78). It is clear that God uses some natural agency to complete the sifting referred to in the verse. This agency is the sum total of the conditions in which men live and the vicissitudes they have to undergo in life. The way in which man adjusts himself to the existing conditions of life or those which result from social and economic changes brings out the finer qualities of his character

and his mental and spiritual attitude, so that the life-process itself is a selective process and history is nothing but an exhibition of this process.

However, here we are not dealing with the conduct of men as individuals but with their group life which is full of changes and vicissitudes. The way in which a particular group responds to the challenges thrown up by natural conditions, social changes or the impact of other societies brings out its moral qualities, and whether these qualities change for better or for worse. The Qur'ānic verse under discussion contains a clear warning to the Muslims that conditions are bound to change and events bound to occur that would test their faith, endurance and devotion to their cause. Thus, it may be safely affirmed that historical events and the changes they bring with them are the agencies through which the selective process in history works itself out. But this historical selective process is much more complex than the biological process of natural selection. In history, diverse and multiple factors are at work which cross each other, intervene in the causal chain and sometimes produce results which would not come into effect if the morally selective process to which we have referred operated freely.

Muslim commentators have differed as to whether the Qur'ānic reference to the separation of the evil-minded from the virtuous applied to the hypocrites among the Muslims who had chosen to join the Muslim community in order to undermine its strength from within, but who were not Muslims at heart, or whether it applied to the separation of the weak-hearted Muslims whose faith in Islam was not strong enough to carry them through all the tests of endurance to which the Muslim community was subjected.[4] In any case, it is clear

that these tests and trials could come only as the result of some historical event, such as a war or a siege or an economic crisis, etc.[5] The conclusion naturally follows that the course of history itself is a moral agency through which the morally superior elements rise to the top, while those who are morally inferior sink to the bottom. The historical process is, therefore, selective in the moral sense of the word.

The same truth is underlined by the Qur'ān in another verse which says, "Or do those who do evil deeds think that We shall make them as those who believe and do good—their life and their death being equal? Evil is what they judge" (XCV:21). This means that the ideological, social and economic structure of societies makes the difference between them. It is wrong to expect a corrupt society without an ideal, moral or religious, to be treated by the process of historical evolution in the same manner as the society which is imbued with virtuous ideals and healthier beliefs. That is because history is not morally neutral and distinguishes sharply between a community which is healthy and that which is morally and socially unhealthy. Al-Ālūsī says very nearly the same thing in his comments[6] on the above verse. Explaining the fact that the two groups can never be equal in their life and death, he remarks, "this is because God has created the world with truth which demands justice, but justice requires that the oppressed should be supported against the oppressor and that a distinction be made between the virtuous and the evil-doers. If this does not happen in life it would definitely come off after death".

With regard to the remark made by al-Ālūsī concerning the hereafter, it should be noted that whatever happens in the hereafter in accordance with the requirements of justice is exclusively related to the other-worldly life of the in-

dividuals. The historical process demands, on the other hand, justice here and now in relation to peoples and nations, although it takes a long time to bring into full play the forces which eventually prove decisive for the success or failure of nations. The time factor apart, it is essentially true that goodness and virtue in any social group receive their due sooner or later, in some form or the other and, correspondingly, wickedness in any nation meets with punishment at some stage or the other in its history. Al-Ālūsī has mixed up individual morality with social morality and God's treatment of individuals with His treatment of nations whose moral state produces its corresponding effects in this very life. It is true that the consequences of human actions, good or bad, in the collective sphere of man's existence do not appear all of a sudden, but given sufficient time, the cumulative effect of these actions is bound to make themselves felt.

That virtuous living which is the outcome of a healthy religious faith must inevitably lead to success and the possession of political power has been stressed repeatedly by the Qur'ān. For example, the Qur'ān says, "Allāh has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will surely make them rulers in the earth, as He made those before them rulers, and that He will establish for them their religion, which He has chosen for them, and that He will surely give them security in exchange after their fear" (XXIV:55).[7] "And certainly We wrote in the Book after the reminder that My righteous servants shall inherit the land" (XXI:105).

Both these verses should be applied to the collective life of a community, for God certainly does not mean that He will place certain individuals in positions of power and influence as a reward for their virtuous living. As individuals, men may remain obscure and unconsequential despite

their moral virtues. But when a social group of any considerable size becomes imbued with faith and starts, in consequence, on a life of virtue and godliness, it develops, besides individual virtues, some social virtues of a high order, such as the spirit of mutual co-operation, a feeling of corporate personality, a readiness to accept the risks and undergo the sacrifices required by its social ideals, etc. All these higher qualities spring from its faith which furnishes the element of dynamism in its corporate life. This dynamic quality enables it to triumph over much larger groups whose sense of corporate personality is not so strong, who are lacking in the ideals that spring from faith. Therefore, when the Qur'ān speaks of virtues, they should be taken in a much larger sense than is usually understood for they include those active and positive social virtues which are called forth by a virile faith.

In any case, when any such group which is inspired by faith and strengthened by the sense of its corporate personality comes into conflict with other groups which lack the cohesive power of faith and the social virtues that spring from it, the result of the conflict is always the disintegration of the less virtuous social group and the accession to power of the one which is more cohesive and is inspired by the ideals of its faith. This is, in brief, the process to which the Qur'ān refers in the verses quoted above.

Some Muslim commentators[8] interpret the verse "My righteous servants shall inherit the land" in a more restricted sense. They maintain that the land spoken of here means the bliss and happiness of the future existence of which only the virtuous shall be the recipients, while the power and strength of this world can be acquired alike by the virtuous and the wicked. However, this interpretation does not seem to be correct, since history, according

to the Qur'ān, as we have already noted, is not totally neutral in respect of virtue and wickedness in so far as they exhibit themselves in corporate life. Besides, there are other Muslim commentators[9] like al-Kalbī and Ibn 'Abbās whose interpretation supports our viewpoint.

Time-factor in Historical Change

The Qur'ān makes it clear that historical changes do not occur suddenly. There is a slow accumulation of causes which results in a big change only after a considerable lapse of time. In the Qur'ānic terminology, the Divine year consists of one thousand years as human beings count them, which is another way of saying that Gods' scale of computation and measurement is different from that of man. "And they ask thee to hasten on the chastisement, and Allāh by no means fails in His promise. And surely a day with thy Lord is like a thousand years of what you reckon. And how many a town to which I gave respite, while it was unjust, then I seized it. And to Me is the return" (XXII:47-8).

Although the Muslim commentators have differed as to whether the chastisement referred to in this verse refers to the punishment in the hereafter or to the punishment that overtakes a people in temporal history, for their misdeeds, the context of the verse and specially the mention of the fate that overtakes an unjust town (i.e. its inhabitants), make it quite clear that the Qur'ān is referring to the temporal history of man. This is also the opinion of al-Ālūsī who quotes Farrā as saying that this verse includes both the punishment here and now as well as the punishment in the hereafter. When God says that He does not fail in His promise, the reference is to the promise that the wicked will be punished in the world and "that a day of punishment in the

hereafter will be like a thousand years (of punishment)[10] in this world". Al-Rāzī[11] also interprets "a thousand years" in much the same way. He says that it stands for the length of time needed in the hereafter for taking stock of human deeds. He also says that even a small period of time looks like a long period of time, if one is facing troubles and adversities. Therefore, a long period of punishment in the hereafter will look even longer. However, this interpretation of one 'divine year' being equal to a thousand human years does not fit in the context, for the meaning plainly is that the wicked people thought that since no punishment had overtaken them in spite of their evil doings,spread over a long period of time, none was likely to befall them in future. God's reply is that you judge things according to your human way of measuring time, while in God's reckoning, the years through which you have gone unpunished form but a very brief period because to Him your thousand years are like one year. Therefore, the punishment will come but not so soon as some people might think. The reason is that God's measurement of time is different from that of man. The years you have been thinking of may seem a long time to you, but according to God's way of measuring time, they constitute an infinitesimal period. The "thousand years" spoken of should not be taken literally. They merely refer to a considerable period of time.

This same fact has been stressed by the Qur'ān in another verse which says, "And thy Lord is Forgiving, full of mercy. Were He to punish them for what they earn, He would certainly hasten the chastisement for them. But for them there is an appointed time from which they will find no refuge. And these towns We destroyed them when they did wrong. And We have appointed a time for their destruction" (XVIII:58-9). Here again stress has been laid on the

peculiar nature of the time-process, namely, that social and moral causes take a long time to produce effects. Nothing can happen before its appointed time. God does not punish any group of human beings all at once. Were He to judge them strictly by what they deserve, their fate would be sealed. But He gives them plenty of opportunity to reform themselves and change their ways.

Al-Rāzī[12] says that the Qur'ān is here referring to the fact that God left the people of Mecca unpunished. If He willed He could punish them without giving them any respite. But He did not do so, in spite of the extremes to which they carried their enmitv to the Prophet, for God said that there was an appointed time for the punishment of these people and that appointed time may either be the Judgment Day or it may be the life here and now. In the latter case, it was the Day of Badr or all such times as brought victory to the Muslims. Then the Qur'ān refers to some of the ancient peoples who were guilty of wrong-doings as the Meccans. So God destroyed them but the destruction did not befall them until a fixed time.

Al-Rāzī's opinion that the Qur'ān refers here to the punishment which the people of Mecca deserved is very much open to question, for the Qur'ān has not mentioned any specific town or people in the verse. It is making a general statement on the nature of God's dealings with men in so far as group-life is concerned and by way of illustration it refers to the fate suffered by some of the ancient nations.

In this connection the Qur'ān informs us that some of the disbelievers even went to the length of asking the Prophets who warned them of the impending doom, to hasten the process of divine retribution and make their threats materia-

lize. "They said: O Noah! indeed thou hast disputed with us and prolonged the dispute with us, so bring upon us that which thou threatens us with, if thou art truthful" (XI:33). The reply given by the Qur'ān is that God's method is to put off the evil consequences of man's misdeeds (with a view to giving to the evil-doers an opportunity for self-correction), for says the Qur'ān, "if God were to take to task the living things for their wrong-doing, not an animal would be left on the face of the earth, but He fixes a term for the retribution that is to come, and when the term approaches its end, it is only then that the wrong-doers receive their condign punishment" (XVI:61).

In a similar passage the Qur'ān says that if God were to punish human beings for what they did (by way of wrong and injustice), the earth would not be left with even a single animate being, but His method is to put them (i.e. the evil consequences of their misdeeds) off for a fixed term, but when that term comes to a close then God is the Seer of His servants (i.e. He confronts them with the consequences of their evil-deeds) (XXXVI:45).

From these Qur'ānic statements, one may conclude that historical changes occur, according to the Qur'ān, very slowly and imperceptibly. The surface of life remains calm and unruffled over long periods though pressures may be accumulating below it which will burst out one day like thunder or lightning. We may cite an example from physical phenomena such as the heating and boiling of water. On the surface the water appears calm and undisturbed but below heat has been gathering which after a certain point has been reached bursts through the outer surface and makes the water boil. Similarly, the consequences of social and moral misconduct in a community are not perceptible, until a sufficiently long

period of time has elapsed. This does not mean that human misconduct does not have its corresponding consequences. Only, that these consequences and effects do not gather the force necessary to initiate a major change in society. The intervening period is open to all sorts of possibilities. If the people reform themselves and change themselves for the better the effects of previous misconduct may be nullified and the community may regain its lost strength and solidarity. However, if people persist in wrong ways, heedless of the warnings of those gifted with spiritual power and vision, the effects and consequences of their misdeeds begin to gather force, until at last they burst forth in the form of some social convulsion or political defeat which shakes the foundations of society and sweeps away the miscreants. This, in brief, is the time factor, which influences and shapes human society.

Forms of Punishment

The Qur'ān speaks of three different ways in which a people may be made to suffer for its evil deeds. "Say: He has power to send on you a chastisement from above you or from beneath your feet, or to throw you into confusion (making you) of different parties, and make some of you taste the violence of others" (VI:65). According to some commentators,[13] this verse in its literal sense refers to three kinds of punishments witnessed by some of the ancient peoples. For example, the punishment from above may come in the shape of torrential rain and floods resulting therefrom, as happened in the case of the people of Noah, or it may be some terrific lightning which ignites a conflagration. It may also descend in the shape of fearful sounds as happened to the people of Ṣāliḥ. The punishment from below may refer to some disastrous earth-quake or the sinking

of ground from beneath the feet as happened in the cas of Korah (the contemporary of Moses). Again the punishment from below may also refer to drought and the resulting destruction of plant life.

However, there is another interpretation of the verse. According to Ibn 'Abbās,[14] in a tradition narrated by 'Ikramah, the punishment from above refers to the tyranny of the rulers and their nobles, while the punishment from below refers to the violence and tyranny of the slaves and those who are lower down in the social scale. As regards the remark made in the verse that God may split you into groups, parties and sects, it means that the social and political unity of a group may be broken up so that it no longer forms one people but becomes a collection of discordant elements each one of which is bitterly opposed to the other.

In his commentary on the Qur'ān, Maulānā' Mohammed 'Alī[15] says in explanation of this verse that all the three forms of punishment were visited on the Prophet's opponents during the early days of Islam. The punishment from above, he adds, took the form of a storm witnessed in the well-known battle of the Allies which caused the Meccan army to flee, a punishment from beneath took the form of a drought which brought great affliction on the people of Mecca for seven years, while the disbelievers had to taste violence at the hands of the Muslims in the wars which they started themselves. Maulānā Mohammed 'Alī goes on to point out that the modern world is also suffering the same kinds of divine chastisement. The Western capitalists, he remarks, who had the upper hand at first tyrannized over labour and now Bolshevism is wrecking vengeance on the capitalist countries. To add to it, the whole world has been turned into an armed camp and the violence of man against man has reached a peak unthought of before.

The above interpretations of the Qur'ānic verse boil down to the basic fact that the Qur'ān looks upon disunity in all its different forms as a kind of punishment which a people receive for their moral aberrations and failures. This disunity may assume the form of social dissensions accentuated by extreme poverty, on the one hand, and fabulous opulence on the other; it may also take shape in irreconcilable political conflicts between two or more states or two or more political parties, or it may also exhibit itself in religious intolerance between various sects within the same religion. In all these cases, the issues that divide men are ultimately settled through violence resulting in much social misery, disruption and economic loss. In the words of the Qur'ān this is the divine punishment for the misdeeds of peoples and nations. If they had been virtuous, and possessed of a sense of justice and fairplay and had regard for the sentiments and the welfare of others they would not have suffered from all these calamities which come from disunity. But virtue, justice, fairplay, and other similar instincts cannot be had for the asking. They spring from certain convictions, from some principles which are cherished for their own sake and call forth for a certain amount of sacrifice, from a resoluteness and firmness of will which can be fashioned only by loyalty to certain ideals. Therefore, in the ultimate analysis, the historical process is influenced by human convictions and devotion to ethically desirable ideals.

Social Disintegration: Specific Causes

We now come to the discussion of those moral qualities which mark the life of societies undergoing a process of dissolution. In this connection, the Qur'ān propounds two general laws which we would do well to keep in mind before we touch upon those specific moral vices which the Qur'ān

declares to be instrumental in accelerating the process of social disintegration. First, the Qur'ān makes it clear that God does not destroy any social group unjustly, while they are in a state of unawareness (i.e. without having given them adequate warning); secondly, God does not destroy any community while its moral conduct remains on an adequately satisfactory level. Thus the Qur'ān says: "Thy Lord does not destroy towns unjustly, while its people are in a state of unawareness" (VI:132). And, "Thy Lord would not destroy towns unjustly, while their people acted well" (XI:117).

Muslim commentators construe the expression "unjustly" to mean that God does not destroy a community merely because it holds certain beliefs which are not in consonance with what the Qur'ān thinks to be the right kind of beliefs. They argue from the Qur'ānic verse, "Surely, *shirk* (polytheism) is an act of great injustice," which shows that the injustice referred to by the Qur'ān in the first of the above verses means *shirk* (polytheism) or beliefs and tenets opposed to Islamic teachings. The mere fact of holding polytheistic beliefs (which we may broadly interpret as any set of beliefs opposed to Islamic teachings), it is argued, does not form sufficient ground for any kind of divine punishment or destruction of the community, so long as the people are just and fair in their dealings with each other. Disbelief of any kind does not bring about destruction (i.e. social disintegration) unless people become used to unfair dealings with each other, harm one another's interests or commit acts of cruelty and grave injustice. In this connection attention has been drawn to the well-known maxim that power and dominion can go hand in hand with disbelief and paganism but they cannot co-exist with injustice and tyranny.[16]

As regards the Qur'ān's claim that God does not des-

troy a people while they are in a sate of unawareness, Ibn Kaṯẖīr says[17] that this verse points to the fact that unless God has given sufficient warning to a people and repeatedly reminded them (of their wrong ways) by sending Prophets or by means of other signs and pointers, He does not visit them with punishment or destruction.

Both these statements of the Qur'ān have far-reaching implications in regard to the nature of the historical process. The reason is that history takes account only of the practical conduct of affairs in a human society and does not concern itself with abstract principles unless they are effectively translated into action. It is not what men think but what they do that is immediately relevant to history. This does not mean, however, that beliefs and ideas in the minds of men are of no account in shaping history. In point of fact, human conduct is moulded largely by the beliefs and tenets held by any social group. But they have only an indirect bearing on the course of history. It is the practical consequences of a belief or a set of ideas that matter for history and not that belief or set of ideas in abstraction. If a belief loses its vitality and force or is held merely as a sacred tradition of the past it has no effect on the actual process of history, becaues it is unable to influence human conduct. Similarly, a set of ideas that was originally productive of great historical consequences may become warped and distorted out of shape. Its various components may fall into disarrangement, shifting their place in the total system, so that the order of their importance is no longer what it originally was. Alien elements of thought may possibly gain entrance into the system through external influences and the effect of these elements may be to make the system wholly incongruous. It must also be admitted that no system of beliefs is wholly wrong. Therefore, there may be many systems of ideas existing at the same time each

of which may have a relative truth of its own. If there is no direct conflict between them, a system relatively less true may function effectively and produce its corresponding effects on the social plane.

Another reason for the survival of a relatively less true system and the decline of a system with a greater degree of truth may be that the former may have a leadership at its back which is more dynamic and inspiring, while the relatively better system of ideas may lack the support of people gifted with dynamic qualities and stronger will-power, although ultimately and, in the long run, ideas prove stronger in the shaping of history than mere personalities. Therefore a better system of ideas is likely to produce a more dynamic leadership. But for a relatively brief period of history this may not come to pass.

The other important fact is, as the Qur'ān points out, that history never takes a people unawares.[18] In every society, people are not wanting who have the vision to feel the pulse of society and foresee to a certain extent the perils and pitfalls with which it is threatened. Wars, strikes, civil commotions and social convulsions provide ample warning to the people that there is something wrong about the society in which they live. However, when people give no heed to the warnings administered by history and by the men who have a deeper understanding of the moral factors that shape human destiny, the day of retribution is not long in coming.

In dealing with the specific causes which lead to the decay and dissolution of societies the Qur'ān lists many factors which tend to bring about the dissolution. But common, among all these factors, is the idea that it is primarily injustice, tyranny and oppression that bring about the extinction of a

society. Thus the Qur'ān says: "How many townships did We destory. And Our punishment descended on them either at night or at noon, while they were taking rest. But when they were overtaken by the punishment they exclaimed spontaneously that we had been wrong-doers (or guilty of grave injustices)" (VII:3-4).

Commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī[19] says that this is as if the disbelievers were told that they should not be deceived by their command of things that bring security, rest and opulence, because when the Divine punishment befalls a people, it comes upon them suddenly and without warning. Al-Rāzī also quotes Ibn 'Abbās as saying that at the time of punishment, the wrong-doers confessed that they had committed grave injustice and were following evil ways. The same point has been stressed by the Qur'ān in the verse: "And how many a town which was iniquitous did We demolish, and We raised up after it another people. So when they felt Our might, lo! they began to flee from it. Flee not and return to the easy lives which you led and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned. They said: O woe to us! Surely we were unjust. And this cry of theirs ceased not till We made them cut off, extinct" (XXI:11-15).

In this verse[20] the Qur'ān repeats the charge of injustice against the people who had been marked out for destruction. But since the Qur'ān has used the word '*ẓulm*', which also means tyranny, we may conclude that it is not ordinary injustices that lead to social disintegration, because ordinary injustices exist in every society. Even an ideal society may not be totally free from them. Therefore the Qur'ān is here referring to those grave injustices which amount to oppression, whether one section of the people is oppressive in relation to the other or the people, as a whole, deal unjustly with other nations and communities.

But in the above verses the Qur'ān also refers to the underlying cause of those grave injustices which are fatal to the health and integrity of society, for the Qur'ān speaks of the easy lives to which people become habituated. The word '*itrāf*' used by the Qur'ān in the above verse means the excess and the luxury which breed easy-going habits among a people. Therefore, the oppression and inequities prevailing in a society, that is in the process of decay, are the product of these habits. Being surrounded by an atmosphere of luxury, people in such a society develop the love of ease and comfort, which progressively tends to loosen spiritual controls and social discipline. As soon as these controls get loosened it becomes easier for the people to commit injustices and adopt an attitude of inhuman disregard for the rights of the weak and the powerless. It should be noted, however, that the Qur'ān is not opposed to the enjoyment of necessary comforts. What it is opposed to is the love of comfort which makes people unwilling to undertake the risks and sacrifices for collective welfare.

In a similar vein the Qur'ān speaks of the transgressions of those who lead easy lives, resulting in social decay which eventually brings about the destruction of their society. "And when We wish to destroy a town, We send commandments to its people who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein; thus the word proves true against it, so We destroy it with utter destruction......Whoso desires the immediate good (of this life), We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him the hell; he will enter it despised, driven away" (XVII: 17-18).

Al-Rāzī explains the word '*mutraf*' used by the Qur'ān (and translated 'as people who love ease and comfort') to mean one on whom God has showered His (material) gifts

and whom He has blessed with wealth and plenitude. The word '*amr*', he says, means to multiply (and not 'command' as translated above), so that the verse means that when God wishes to destroy a community, He causes those who live in ease and opulence to increase in number. Such people, instead of obeying the Divine commands and acting charitably towards their fellowmen, do the very opposite and spread corruption. Al-Rāzī says that such people have been specially mentioned because those whom God has gifted with wealth and plenitude ought to have been more thankful to God, for the blessings showered on them.[21] According to Ibn Kat͟hir,[22] however, this verse means that when God wants to destroy a nation He puts wicked people at their head.

As regards the latter part of the verse,[23] it is clear that *it refers to two categories of human beings*: (l) those who strive for the attainment of immediate good (in the form of wealth, comfort, and pleasure) and (2) those who work for something more enduring. The Qur'ān says that God helps both these groups, in proportion to the efforts they put forth but, in the ultimate reckoning, those people who have in view the immediate good of life suffer damnation. Thus, the verse points to the fact that the strength and solidarity of a group lies in its undervaluing things of immediate utility and preferring them to the things that lead to ultimate success.

The Qur'ān seems to emphasize again and again that the abundance of things of material utility (in modern terms, economic prosperity) has a tendency to corrupt the morals of a community, unless it is counter-checked by the fear of God and the moral control exercised by religion. "And how many a town We have destroyed," the Qur'ān remarks,[24]

"which exulted in its means of subsistence! So those are their abodes; they have not been dwelt in after them except a little. And We are ever the inheritors" (XXVIII:58).

According to al-Ālūsī[25] the verse means that there were many towns (communities) living in security and abundance enjoying all the amenities of life, until they became conceited and succumbed to self-deception. What is more, they did not fulfil the obligations which they owed (to God and man) in view of the blessings (of God) they had received.

Ibn Kat̲h̲īr,[26] like many other commentators,says that this verse has been addressed to the people of Mecca, and he takes the word "*baṭarah*" (translated above as "exulting in their means of subsistence")[27] in the sense that they (the past nations referred to by the Qur'ān) committed transgression, caused mischief and were guilty of ingratitude to God for the blessings vouchsafed to them.

However, the Qur'ān has made it clear that God does not destroy any nation without giving it an opportunity to learn from its past mistakes and to reform itself. It is only when the people fail to avail themselves of this opportunity and sink into self-complacency and moral turpitude that God inflicts the final punishment on them which proves fatal to their national existence. For example, the Qur'ān says: "And indeed We sent (messengers) to nations before thee, then We seized them with distress and affliction, that they might humble themselves. Yet they did not, when Our punishment came to them, humble themselves? But their hearts hardened and the devil made all, that they did, seem fair to them. Then, when they neglected that with which they had been admonished, We opened for them the gates of all things. Until, when they rejoiced in that which they

were given, We seized them suddenly; then lo! they were in utter despair"[28] (VI:43-4).

Explaining this verse al-Suyūṭī quotes a tradition from the Prophet on the authority of 'Ibādah b. Ṣāmit in which the Prophet says that when God wills that a nation should survive and grow, He endows it with purity of morals, and when He wishes to destroy it, He opens upon it the gate of dishonest living, until when it is puffed up, God seizes it all of a sudden.

Al-Suyūṭī's comments apart, the above verse of the Qur'ān shows that people's response to the challenge thrown up by the adversities and afflictions sent upon them was not what it should have been. Though they got through the hard times by learning to discipline themselves and work harder, their spiritual attitude to life remained what it was. The hardships they had to face trained them in the art and techniques of worldly success, but failed to create the requisite religious and moral sense among them; namely, the feeling of humility, submission and resignation towards God. The result was that as soon as their hardships ceased and better times came they entered upon a period of great economic and material prosperity born of the discipline and hardihood of their past life. But since the religious sense was still lacking among them, this new prosperity and abundance made them insolent, proud of their power and tyrannical to the weaker sections of the population or the foreign nations with whom they had to deal. This brought about their downfall.

The same fact has been stressed by the Qur'ān in the following verses: "And We did not send a Prophet to a town but We seized its people with distress and affliction that they

might humble themselves. Then We changed the evil for good, till they became affluent and said: Distress and happiness did indeed touch our fathers. So We took them by surprise which they perceived not. And if the people of the towns had believed and kept their duty, We would certainly have opened for them blessings from the heaven and the earth. But they rejected, so We seized them for what they earned" (VII:95-6).

It has been pointed out by some commentators[29] that the remark "Distress and unhappiness did indeed touch our fathers" means that, in the opinion of these people, the afflictions through which they had passed were not the outcome of their beliefs and practices. On the other hand they thought that such vicissitudes were normal to the process of history. The did not view them as constituting a divine judgement on their misdeeds and evil practices. This shows that these people felt no gratitude for the good fortune with which God had blessed them after the hardships they had experienced. Similarly the peace and security that they enjoyed after a strenuous time of troubles and privations did not create among them the inclination to obey and fulfil the commandments of God Who had showered so many blessings upon them.

The main idea of the Qur'ān in both the above verses seems to be that it is not affluence so much as the spiritual imbalance from it which is the main cause of national decadence. If people could live in affluence without losing the spiritual and moral values which keep in check the moral and social disorders they might escape the evil consequences of too much prosperity continuing over a long period of time. This is the import of the latter part of the verses: "if the people of the towns had believed and kept their duty,

We would certainly have opened for them blessings from the heaven and the earth." This also shows that prosperity and affluence can co-exist with a spiritually balanced life and a morally healthy society if there is no slackening in the realms of belief and conduct. However, this requires special effort on the part of those who have been entrusted with the moral, religious or political guidance of the community.

In another verse the Qur'ān maintains the same distinction between the punishment that is reformative and the punishment that is intended to destroy a group of people who have proved themselves beyond correction and are incorrigibly corrupt. "And already We seized them with chastisement, but they were not submissive to their Lord, nor did they humble themselves. Until when We opened for them a door of severe chastisement, lo! they are in despair at it" (XXIII:76-7). Ibn Kat͟hīr[30] says in explanation of these verses that God tried them by creating conditions of distress and hardship, but this did not produce any change in their attitude of rejecting the prophets and opposing their teachings. They persisted in their disbelief and erring ways and did not develop any feeling of humility or fear of God, until at last they were overtaken by destruction.

We have seen above that the Qur'ān consistently warns the people against the self-deception and moral corruption that is likely to result from too much affluence unless there exists the counter-balancing force of a strong spiritual faith and the observation of moral restrictions which logically follow from it. But there is another problem closely related to the growth of economic prosperity to which the Qur'ān has called attention, namely, the appearance of commercial malpractices, such as profiteering and hoarding, etc. The

Qur'ān points to such malpractices as the outward manifestation of a deeprooted spiritual malady, which saps the vigour of a nation, "And to Madā'in' (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb. He said: O my people! serve Allāh, you have no other god save Him. And give not short measure and weight. I see you in prosperity; and I fear for you the chastisement of an all-encompassing day: And, O my people! give full measure and weigh justly, and defraud not men of their things, and act not corruptly in the land, making mischief: what remains with Allāh is better for you, if ye are believers" (XI: 84-6). It seems that such practices as giving a customer less in weight than he should have rightfully got or measuring out less than the stipulated quantity (in case of commodities sold by measure) and other methods of defrauding people of their goods or money (which may have included hoarding, profiteering and black-marketing) were widespread among some of the ancient nations mentioned in the Qur'ān. The main idea of the Qur'ān seems to be that these evils cannot be eliminated through legislation alone, for they are symptomatic of a deeper malaise within the body politic. Such unfair means in the fields of commerce and industry betray an attitude towards one's fellow-beings that is inconsistent with belief in God, that is, with the idea that all human beings are creatures of God, springing as they do from a common source. Therefore, if one believes in the brotherhood of man and their common subjection to the sovereignty of God and of His laws, one should not seek to gain undue advantage over one's fellowmen because of one's stronger economic position. He who is guilty of this act disobeys the dictates of his higher self which constitutes the divine element in man. Moreover, once any group of people indulges in these malpractices, whether in the commercial or industrial fields, the attitude of mind fostered by them will not remain confined

to that field. Sooner or later it will overflow and pour itself out in other spheres of social and moral conduct. The idea that different fields of morality can be strictly set apart from each other or can be treated in isolation from each other is basically wrong. All the different fields of morality influence one another, interact with each other, and make one whole in which each part is constantly modified by others. Therefore, the commercial malpractices mentioned in the Qur'ān may not be a strong factor by themselves in shaping a nation's future, but because of the spreading effects of the spiritual attitudes they foster, they become powerful forces of social disintegration.

Among other causes which sap the strength and vitality of a nation, the Qur'ān mentions one which shows that people ought to take a more positive view of virtue and righteousness than that which consists in merely regarding one's own self-correction or self-development as the final goal of moral endeavour. It is not right that a person should lead a life of moral self-sufficiency. As a social being, he is under an obligation to see that others also lead a morally virtuous life and do not indulge in practices detrimental to the spiritual and social well-being of the community. Thus the Qur'ān says: "Why were there not then among the generations before you those possessing understanding, forbidding mischief in the earth, except a few among them whom We delivered? And the unjust pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and they were guilty" (XI:116).

In his commentary Ibn Kathīr says[31] that God is here inquiring as to why among the nations that have passed into oblivion, there were only a few who tried to prevent mischief, evil-doing and disorder in their land. God says that very few people of this type were found among them

and they were saved from destruction, when at last divine punishment descended upon their people. It is for this reason that God has commanded that in this community (the community of Muslims) there should be a (considerable) group of persons who try to enjoin virtue and forbid evil. Ibn Kat̲h̲īr also quotes a tradition from the Prophet which says that if they (the people) see evil practices spreading among them and yet make no attempt to check them and stamp them out, then it may be taken for granted that God is about to send a general punishment upon them.

Al-Rāzī[32] explains "the unjust" in the above verse as referring to those who failed in their duty of fighting corruption and evil-doing. These people, he says, paid no heed to one of the greatest pillars of religion, namely the enjoining of good and the forbidding of evil (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf wa nahy' an al-munkar*). Instead of fulfilling this religious obligation they passed their lives in the pursuit of pleasures, including sexual self-satisfacton, and engaged themselves in the acquisition of power and pelf.

The same principle has been stressed by the Qur'ān in a verse which refers to the disobedience of some of the Jews in violating the *Sabbath* by catching fish on the sacred day. "When a party of them said: Why preach you to a people whom Allāh would destroy or whom He would chastise with a severe chastisement, they said: To be free from blame before your Lord, and that haply they may guard against evil. So when they neglected that whereof they had been reminded, We delivered those who forbade evil and We overtook those who were iniquitous with an evil chastisement because they transgressed" (VII:164-5).

There are two views in regard to the persons men-

tioned in the above verses[33]: (1) There was a group which caught fish and there was another which did not do so. The latter again was split into two parties, one which took upon itself the task of correcting the miscreants and persuading them to give up the forbidden practices. Another party took up a neutral attitude and tried to dissuade the first from trying to reform those who took to the forbidden course. It told the former that they remonstrated in vain with the people whom God was about to destroy. In the opinion of this party these people had reached a stage of disobedience where no sermons could stop them from the transgression they had been committing. (2) The other view about the verses in question is that there were two groups, one which committed transgression and the other which was trying to dissuade them from what they had been doing. It was this group of sinners who told the other group that there was no use preaching to those who, in their opinion, were going to be punished or destroyed. Some hold that the first view is the correct one and that there were three groups as mentioned in (1) above. Ibn Abb'ās holds that the third group also perished. It is said that he wept whenever he recited these verses saying that those who refrained from forbidding the evil-doers mentioned by the Qur'ān perished, while he and his contemporaries saw evils prevalent in their society, but kept quiet doing nothing for their removal.

Finally, the Qur'ān makes a most significant remark about the causes which bring about the degeneration of a society and eventually lead it to extinction. It says: "And Allāh sets forth the parable: A town safe and secure, to which its means of subsistence come in abundance from every quarter, but it disbelieved in Allāh's favour, so Allāh made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought" (XVI: 112).

Al-Shawkānī says[34] that the commentators have differed as to whether the town mentioned here is a specific town or it refers to any people whom God favoured with His gifts , but the divine gifts (instead of making them humble in spirit and grateful to God) made them insolent (so that they lost their spiritual equilibrium). Al-Shawkānī himself prefers the other alternative and says that if we take the verse as applying to any town or people, then Mecca and its inhabitants become a particular instance of a general statement.

Another commentator[35] says that a parable always refers to anything which is characterized by a definite quality whether the thing is actually existent or not. Therefore, the parable set forth by the Qur'ān in the above verse may refer to some place which has only a hypothetical existence or it may refer to a certain town. On the latter assumption the town referred to may or may not be Mecca, although most commentators believe that it refers to Mecca, which is more probable. That the Qur'ān ascribes certain peculiarities of the town in the above verse, namely, its enjoying peace and security, its being safe from external aggression, shows that it may possibly be referring to Mecca, because the Arabs looked upon that town as a sacred place and refrained from making raids on the people of Mecca for whom they had great respect.

Putting all these interpretations together, we may ask why the town or the people suffered the fate which overtook them and were punished with economic disaster ('hunger' used by the Qur'ān really means economic collapse) and insecurity of person and property. (The expression 'fear' used by the Qur'ān means nothing but the insecurity from which a nation suffers, because of its political and military weaknesses.)

The Qur'ān ascribes this change of fortune to the misuse of the gifts with which the people had been favoured. The translation of the verse given above, i.e., "they disbelieved in the gifts of God" is not really correct, because '*kufr*' in Arabic (the word used by the Qur'ān) does not mean disbelief only but also the misuse of powers and gifts which goes along with disbelief. However, behind this misuse there is something deeper at work. It is that a nation on the way to decadence and disintegration loses the sense that all things are held in trust from God for public weal and the service of humanity. In other words, it loses faith in the moral values which support society and are themselves rooted in some system of belief. In the ultimate analysis, therefore, the Qur'ān holds that it is the system of beliefs and of the moral values based thereon that constitutes the main factor in shaping the destinies of nations and peoples.

Mechanics of Historical Change

The Qur'ān gives us certain clear notions in regard to agencies through which historical changes are effected. It says that when some historical change is about to occur, it comes through conflict between two groups or powers, one of which succeeds in removing the other from the position of power and authority, and that such conflicts and the historical changes they effect are necessary for the spiritual well-being of humanity. If changes like these do not occur, mankind would get corrupted to the core. "And were it not for Allāh's repelling some men by others, the earth would certainly be in a state of disorder" (II:251). This verse occurs in connection with the defeat of Goliath (jālūt) by Saul (Ṭālūt), and it is preceded by another verse in which some people

belonging to the band led by Saul are said to have remarked: "How often has a small party vanquished a numerous host by Allāh's permission" (II:249). This shows that, from the Qur'ānic viewpoint, numerical superiority is not of much consequence in the conflict of groups, and has very little bearing on the issue provided, of course, one of the two groups is morally superior to the other.

The verse admits of other explanations also.[36] The first is that if God had not saved some men from disbelief through others, the world would have been filled with disorder. If this explanation is correct, then those who repel (i.e. save others from disbelief) must be the Prophets and other spiritual leaders, because they prevent men from succumbing to disbelief by setting forth arguments or confronting the disbelievers with some clear proof or sign of the truth they have been preaching. The second probable explanation is that if God had not kept some people away from sin and forbidden evil things through some others, humanity would have become degenerated. On this basis it may be claimed that those who save others (from following the path of sin and taking to forbidden things) are the people who perform the duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil, just as the Qur'ān says: "You are the best people taken out for (the spiritual uplift of) humanity, because you enjoin (on others) what is good and prevent them from doing evil." In this category are also included the leaders appointed to enforce the religious restrictions (prescribed by God) and to ensure that the external rites of Islam are observed. The third probable explanation is that if God does not protect some people against political disorders, social upheavals and other disturbances created by miscreants the world would be irretrievably lost to peace and progress. On this supposition the defenders

would be the Prophets, political leaders and kings. The Prophets brought systems of divine law (*Sharā'i'*) with them so that the recurring disputes among peoples might be settled on the basis of justice and equity. Otherwise there will be chaos and no peace.

The gist of the above argument is that the world is saved from corruption, disturbance and anarchy by means of laws promulgated by the Prophets, but there must exist some authority to enforce these laws and, therefore, kings and rulers are necessary.

The fourth probability is that the verse refers to the defence of religion and morality by faithful believers and men of piety and virtue against the evil and corruption created by disbelievers and men of doubltful morality. In confirmation of this explanation, there is a tradition from the Prophet which says that God defends the community of Islam from those who do not pray through those who pray, from those who do not purify themselves through the payment of *zakāt* (poor tax) through those who do so in the manner prescribed, from those who do not fast through those who do fast, from those who do not perform the pilgrimage (to Mecca) through those who do perform pilgrimage, from those who do not fight in the way of God through those who do the fighting (in the cause of God), but if the entire Community were to become united in abandoning these (prescribed) duties, God would not look toward it even for a single moment, and then the Prophet recited the first of the above verses.

The above explanations, however, do not sufficiently express the fundamental idea which the Qur'ān really wants

to project. To get at the root of that idea we should keep in view a similar verse of the Qur'ān which says: "Permission is given (to fight) to those against whom war is made, because they are oppressed.... Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allāh. And if Allāh did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allāh's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allāh will help him who helps Him. Surely, Allāh is strong" (XXII:39-40).

From these verses, it becomes clear that when the Qur'ān speaks of God repelling some men through others, it is really propounding a general law of historical change and not merely referring to particular aspects of religious and moral life and the removal of evils from it. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, points to the conflict of groups and nations of which the ultimate consequence is not merely the seizure of power by one group or nation from another but the substitution of a new system of life and evaluation by another. It is here referring to the injustice, economic, social or religious, which accompanies the rule of any group of men, if their tenure of power is perpetuated over a considerable period of time, because power has a tendency to breed corruption, if it remains confined to a particular group or nation, generation after generation, unless there is some mechanism for the renewal of that moral and spiritual vigour which brought power to that group or nation. A system of life which cannot renew itself from time to time must degenerate and produce corruption and injustice, which can be removed only by the victory of another group with a different system of life and moral values. It is for this reason that Islam did not merely create a new system of life but also created therewith the mechanisms of

Ijtihād and *Ijmā'* for the renewal of the vigour which brought it to power.

Another way in which historical changes may take place is the revolt of a minority which has been kept too long under subjection and suffered all kinds of hardships incidental to political and economic subjection. This principle has been enunciated by the Qur'ān in connection with the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, where they lived for a long time under the oppressive rule of the Pharaohs. "And We desired to bestow a favour upon those who were deemed weak in the land and to make them the leaders, and to make them the heirs. And to grant them power in the land, and to make Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts see from them what they feared" (XXVIII:6-7).

Although these verses are specifically related to the history of the Israelites and their struggle against their Egyptian overlords, they point to a recurring phenomenon of history. It would not, however, be right to conclude from these verses that every suppressed minority necessarily revolts against its oppressor or that such a revolt, if it does come about, is in all cases ethically and historically justifiable and, therefore, bound to result in the defeat of the tyrannical majority. It is nevertheless, true that most often in history a creative leadership appears on the scene from among those who have been denied equal political and economic apportunities and, therefore, rendered comparatively weak and powerless. This may happen either in relation to the weaker groups within a nation, or as was the case with the Israelites, the rebels may belong to a different nation. This generally is the case with imperialism.

The question here arises as to why God particularly

favours a minority rendered weak and powerless. The reply seems to be that such a minority is much more conscientious, much more inured to hardships and far less corrupt, while the nation or group which rules over it, gets morally corrupted through the exercise of power over a long period of time. The comforts and pleasures of life which its economic superiority secures for it has a benumbing effect on its physical courage and intellectual alertness. For these reasons, it proves itself unequal in the struggle which is forced upon it, in spite of the political and economic superiority that it enjoys.

The above arguments are supported by the Qur'ān itself, which, referring to the recurrent struggle of the Prophets of yore, says: "And those who disbelieved said to their messengers: We would certainly drive you out of our land, unless you come back to our religion. So their Lord revealed to them: We shall certainly destroy the wrong-doers. And verily We shall make you to dwell in the land after them. This is for him who fearth My Majesty and fearth My threats. And they sought help (from their Lord) and every forward potentate was brought to nought" (XIV:14-15).

Al-Rāzī[37] explains the expression '*maqāmī*' used by the Qur'ān (and translated above as 'My Majesty') as meaning "One who fears my strict dispensation of justice," for God, he adds, takes no decision except on the basis of truth, justice and equity. Similarly, the word '*jabbār*' (translated above as 'potentate') has been explained by al-Rāzī as meaning one who is conceited enough to think himself above all (divine) laws. It is clear from this that the Qur'ān regards the defeat and humiliation of the wielders of power as the consequence of their conceit which leads them to think that they are above law. This attitude of mind is certain to goad them to wrong-doing, injustice and tyranny, because

it is respect for law that keeps man within the bounds of reasonableness, equity and fair-dealing. On the other hand, the Prophets and their followers who suffer the wrongs and injustices inflicted upon them by the ruling group have been described by the Qur'ān as being among those who fear the divine dispensation of justice. The implication is that their character remains incorruptible on account of the fear of moral retribution. Therefore, in their relations with other human beings, they are fair, just and full of love and benevolence. This adds to their strength, while the conceit of the ruling group progressively weakens it through the loss of sympathizers in the conflict that ensues between the two. The issue is decided by the moral factors that go into the struggle and mere brute force or numerical strength forms a relatively unimportant factor.

Preponderance of the Moral Factor in History

The Qur'ān has repeatedly made it clear that the possession of material power or numerical superiority by any group of persons or by a community does not in any way indicate that it is morally or spiritually superior to others. Material progress, in other words, is different from moral and spiritual progress, although the two types of progress can co-exist and mutually help each other. "And We never sent a warner to a town but those who led easy lives in it said: We have more wealth and children, and we cannot be punished (XXXIV:34-5). Ibn Kaṯẖīr[38] explains the word '*mutraf*' used in the Qur'ān to mean those who have been favoured with material gifts, worldly honour, wealth and power. Quoting Qatādah, Ibn Kaṯẖīr says that the persons referred to by the Qur'ān are the tyrants, leaders and chiefs. In any case the Qur'ān contests their claim that, because they are in possession of wealth, power and numerical superiority, they are

necessarily immune from punishment. The Qur'ān follows it up with the statement: "And it is not your wealth or your children that brings you near to Us, but whoever believes and does good work, for such is a double reward for what they do and they are secure in the highest place" (XXXIV:37).

The two verses prove that, according to the Qur'ān, material progress is not the same thing as spiritual progress. The two are not contradictory but neither are they equivalent to each other. Secondly, these verses show that spiritual blindness becomes widespread among those who have been holding material and political power for a considerable period of time. This very enjoyment of power and wealth makes them impervious to the call of reason, fairplay and equity. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to convince them that they are following a path which will eventually lead them to material as well as spiritual ruin. The same point has been stressed by the Qur'ān in the verses: "Let not the control and power (in the land) of those who disbelieve deceive you. A brief enjoyment, then their abode is hell"[39] (III:195-6). This means that the power and wealth enjoyed by any group of persons should not cause any one to believe that these things are going to last long. If those who hold power and wealth are not guided by a healthy system of beliefs, resulting in appropriate moral conduct, then their eventual ruin and disgrace becomes inevitable.

This very theme has been touched upon by the Qur'ān in the verse, "And when Our clear messages are recited to them, those who disbelieve say to those who believe: which of the two parties (yours or ours) is better in position and more imposing as an army. And how many a generation have We destroyed before them, who has had better possessions and appearance" (XIX:73-4).[40] Here a warning has

been administered to those who take material progress or economic prosperity as an unmistakable indication of their superiority or of the inherent strength and solidarity of any social group. The Qur'ān says in clear terms that material strength and possessions offer no guarantee against social degeneration and political decay. Those who judge things by their appearances are often mistaken. Spiritual progress or the socio-political strength and internal solidarity of a society cannot be measured in terms of the statistics of wealth, population or the amenities enjoyed by a people.

This argument has been most clearly and conclusively set forth by the Qur'ān in connection with the story of Korah, an Israelite and a contemporary of Moses. "Korah was surely of the people of Moses, but he oppressed them, and We gave him treasures, so much so that his hoards of wealth would weigh down a body of strong men. When his people said to him: Exult not; surely Allāh loves not the exultant. And seek the abode of the Hereafter by means of what Allāh has given thee, and neglect not thy portion of the world, and do good (to others) as Allāh has done good to thee and seek not to make mischief in the land. Surely, Allāh loves not the mischief-makers. He said: I have been given this only on account of the knowledge I have. Did he not know that Allāh had destroyed before him generations who were mightier in strength than he and greater in assemblage. So he went forth to his people in finery. Those who desired the life of this world said: O would that we had the like of what Korah is given. Surely, he is possessed of mighty good fortune! But those who were given the knowledge said: Woe to you! Allāh's reward is better for him who believes and does good and none is made to receive this except the patient. So We made the earth to swallow him up and his abode. He had

no host to help him against Allāh, nor was he of those who could defend themselves" (XXVIII:76-81)[41].

These verses set forth in clear terms the whole stand of the Qur'ān in regard to the process of historical change and of the impact made on it by the economic factor. They show that unless wealth is used by its possessors for the moral and material uplift of humanity, it is more likely to bring them to the brink of disaster. It also shows that unless economic prosperity and social status go together with a feeling of humility and a sense of one's accountability to God, and an understanding of the social obligations involved in the possession of wealth and power, these things are productive of social wrongs which ultimately end in the dissipation, humiliation, and disintegration of the group which wrongs the society. As the Qur'ān says, it is only men of knowledge and vision who can see through the outer glamour that surrounds the possessors of power and wealth, for they have the spiritual insight to understand that only the power which rests on virtuous life and is directed towards the good of humanity and only that wealth and economic prosperity which is specially responsive and attentive to the demands of social justice can enjoy a relative degree of permanence. Lacking these attributes, they will be quickly and effectively swept away by the historical process into the limbo of things forgotten.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have repeatedly referred to the fact that the Qur'ān attaches very little importance to material progress, unless it is rooted in the same spiritual world-view. But this should not be taken to imply that the Qur'ān undervalues the importance of material power or conceives of spiritual power as something completely divorced from material and social means. The spiritual power that the Qur'ān speaks of springs from the world-view that is enshrined

in its pages and the system of social ethics based upon it. This world-view and the social ethics that go along with it generate a will to harness material power for its own ends. So long as these three factors, namely the world-view of the Qur'ān, its social ethics, and the material power that they generate, cohere with each other, humanity is assured of a perfect social equilibrium. But when these elements fall apart, the balance is disturbed. When the Qur'ān denounces the purely worldly power of the Pharaohs and some of the ancient nations that have suffered destruction, its reference is to a power that has broken loose from ethical moorings and is unsupported by any adequate world-view. As such the Qur'ān does not disparage material wealth or power or worldly progress in itself.

NOTES

1. Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Cairo, 1308 A.H., V: 392.

2. Al-Rāzī explains the word *'adh* used by the Qur'ān as implying leadership (*imāmah*) which has been mentioned by the Qur'ān before. He, however, adds if leadership (*imāmah*) has been spoken of in the sense of prophethood, it would mean that prophethood can never be conferred on the wrong-doers. Another implication of the word *'ahd* (covenant), according to al-Rāzī, may be that of the mercy and grace of God. The verse, therefore, would mean that the wrong-doers cannot hope for the mercy and grace of God.

   Yet another possible implication of the word *'adh*, in al-Rāzī's opinion, is that of a Command of God. From this comes *'uhūd* (plural of *'ahd*) of the caliphs to their *'āmils* and judges, that is, the commands that the caliphs issue to them. When it has been proved that the *'ahd* (covenant) of Allāh is His Command, His words 'My Covenant does not include the wrong-doers' admits of two possible explanations. First, it may mean that He does not appoint the wrong-doers (to positions of command or power) or it may mean

that it is not permissible that the wrong-doers should be placed in a position where people have to accept from them the Commands of God. The verse, therefore, establishes that wicked preople should not be appointed rulers or leaders. It also proves that if a wicked person is placed in a position of command or power, his commands should not be obeyed. Similarly, his evidence should not be accepted nor any report which comes from him. If he gives a verdict on any legal or religious issue, it should be similarly treated as unacceptable. (Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:473-86.)

3. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:193.

4. According to al-Ālūsī, this verse is capable of being interpreted in two ways First, it may mean that God will not leave the believers(i.e. those who sincerely believe in Islam) in the condition in which they are, unless those whose belief in Islam is strong enough to stand the test of endurance and harsdhips are separated from those who display weakness of faith in the face of such trials. Another interpretation may be that the verse refers to the separating of the true believers from the hypocrites who outwardly profess Islam in order to undermine it. Al-Ālūsī further says that the great majority of the commentators incline towards the latter interpretation (cf. al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, IV:136-7). Al-Rāzī says, on the other hand, that God has informed us that all these conditions will help distinguish the true Muslims from the hypocrites, because when the war against the disbelievers was about to commence, they showed fear, returned from the battlefield and made much of the fact that a large number of people was slain. After this they either prevented or dissuaded the Muslims from taking recourse to war a second time. God says, according to al-Rāzī, that it does not fit in with His Wisdom to leave the believers in a condition in which a true Muslim is indistinguishable from a hypocrite who is able to pass himself as a Muslim. On the other hand, it becomes necessary for God in His Wisdom to create the conditions and bring to pass incidents which would establish the distinction between the two. (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI:104-5.)

5. As regards the ways and means by which God separates the believers from the hypocrites, al-Rāzı says that they are three. First, God may send upon the community of Muslims hardships, adversities, wars and defeat. The result will be that whoever is a true Muslim

will remain devoted to his faith even under these conditions and loyal to the Prophet, but he who is a hypocrite will come out in his true colours and prove that he is a hypocrite and a disbeliever. Secondly, God has promised that the believers will be helped by Him, while the disbelievers will suffer disgrace. Therefore, when Islam became powerful and the disbelievers suffered the ignominy of defeat, the Muslims became clearly distinguished from those who did not believe in Islam. Thirdly, there are certain indications which bring out the distinction between the true Muslims and the hypocrites. For example, the Muslims feel happy, when the power of Islam grows while the hypocrites feel correspondingly depressed.

Al-Rāzī further raises the question that if the distinction (between the Muslims and the hypocrites) becomes clear, then the hypocrites become declared disbelievers and their disbelief, once it is established, precludes them from being hypocrites but if their disbelief does not come to light, the promise of God (that God will not leave the Muslims in their present state until He has separated the good ones from the bad ones) will not be fulfilled. Al-Rāzī's reply to this objection is that what is required is not a clear-cut distinction between the believers and the hypocrites but a relative distinction (based on their respective behaviours in the face of trials). That is why God has further said in continuation of the same verse, "Nor is Allāh going to acquaint you with the unseen but Allāh chooses of His messengers whom He pleases" (III: 178). This means, in effect, that God is not going to inform you directly as to who is a Muslim and who is a hypocrite because the usual *Sunnah* (way of God) is that He does not inform the common people of this distinction from the unseen world. On the other hand, it is only the tests, trials and tribulations which befall the community, through which the disclosure is made as to who is a real Muslim and who is merely a nominal Muslim. God, however, informs His chosen Prophets from the unseen world of such a distinction, so that they alone have a definite knowledge of who is a true Muslim and who is not. It is also possible that this verse may mean that God gives the Law and the *Sharī'ah* to his chosen prophets and by this means the true nature of men is disclosed because the Law puts every man on trial. Al-Rāzī means that they only are true Muslims who fulfil the requirements of the Law. (Cf. al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI: 104-5.)

6. Al-Ālūsi, *op. cit.*, XXIV:150.

7. Al-Rāzī interprets this verse as predictive of the rise to power of the first three Caliphs after the prophet, known as the rihtly-guided caliphs. His argument is that so long as the Prophet was alive there could be no question of his succession, that is, of a ruler being substituted in his place. (The verb '*istikhlāf*' used by the Qur'ān means to bestow succession on some person.) Therefore, succession refers to the rule of the rightly-guided caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. It was in their time that great conquests took place and the Muslims became well established and their religion triumphed over all other faiths. The same, however, is not true, in al-Rāzī's opinion, of the period of 'Alī the fourth Caliph, who spent most of his time in internecine fighting. Therefore, there was no expansion of Islam during his reign. (Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI:288.)

8. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI:136-7.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Al-Ālūsī *op. cit.*, XVII:169-70.

11. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI:163-4.

12. *Ibid.*, VI:491.

13. *Ibid.*, IV:62.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Maulānā Muḥammad Alī, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-91, f.n. 785.

16. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V,:97.

17. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1375 A.H., II:178.

18. Al-Rāzī's comment on the unawareness of the people is that this does not refer to the fact that a community remains heedless of what is preached to it or of the ideals set before it. It refers to the fact that God does not put before them that to which they should owe allegiance nor does he remove their plea of ignorance. (Al-Rāzī, IV:151.)

19. *Ibid.*, IV:179.

20. In commenting on this verse, al-Suyūṭī refers fo certain incidents in Arabian history, one of which has been narrated by Ibn Abī Ḥātim

on the authority of Wahb. He says that there were two towns in the Yemen. Their inhabitants became so arrogant and lived in such a state of ease (and affluence) that they used to shut their gates (on the needy and poor persons). When they became so conceited and arrogant, God sent a prophet to preach (righteousness) to them. But when he called them (to the path of virtue) they killed him. Then God put it in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar to attack them who sent a punitive force for this purpose, but the two towns defeated the invaders. Nebuchadnezzar sent a second expedition which also suffered the same fate. At last Nebuchadnezzar personally marched against them and defeated them until they began to leave the towns and flee (to some place of refuge). (Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.* IV:314-15.)

21. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:378.

22. Ibn Kat̲h̲īr gives this meaning on the authority of an explanation of Ibn 'Abbās (cf. *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1375 A.H., III:33).

23. Al-Rāzī says, in explanation of the verse, that God helps both these groups with wealth and extends to them all the provisions of life, such as wealth, offspring and things that enable them to gain respect and self-adornment, because the gifts of God are equally open to all, believer or disbeliever (*Tafsīr*, V:380-81).

24. Al-Rāzī, in common with other commentators, says that this verse has been addressed to the people of Mecca who rejected the Prophet of Islam. God, he adds, reminds them of many nations that lived in past history. God favoured them with all His blessings, so far as the material accompaniments of life were concerned. But when they rejected their prophets, all these divine blessings were withdrawn. The people who suffered from this punishment said in explanation of their non-acceptanee of the prophets that they did so out of the fear of losing their favoured position. So God made it clear to them that it was their insistence on the non-acceptance of the prophets' teachings that has resulted in the withdrawal of these favours and not their inclination (if there was any) to acknowledge the truth of the prophets' teachings. (*Tafsīr*, VI:416-17.)

25. Al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, XX:98.

26. Ibn Kat̲h̲īr, *op. cit.*, III:395-6.

27. The word *'batarat'* used by the Qur'ān means that they becam· arrogant on account of the blessings they had received and used them for purposes other than those for which they had been meant (*al-Munjid*). According to the *Lisān al-'Arab*, the word means that they were ungrateful for the blessings they received (vide L.A., Beirut, 1955. IV:69).

28. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, III:14.

29. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, IV:261.

30. Ibn Kat͟hīr, *op. cit.*, III:251.

31. *Ibid.*, II:464·

32. Al-Rāzī, V:97.

33. *Ibid.*, IV:306.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Al-S͟hawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, Cairo, 1350 A.H., p. 192.

36. Al-Rāzī, V:355.

37. *Ibid.*, II:302-3.

38. *Ibid.*, V:225-6.

39. *Ibn* Kat͟hīr, III:540-41.

40. Al-Rāzī says that there are two sections of opinion in regard to this verse. First, that it refers to the polytheists of Mecca who were carrying on a flourishing trade and enjoyed all the good things of life. Some of the Muslims said that the enemies of God were prospering, while they were perishing with hunger. On the other hand Al-Rāzī adds that Farrā is of the opinion that the Jews travelled extensively and acquired riches and property. Therefore, the Muslims were told that the prosperity of the Jews and their ability to go out in quest of commercial gain and their own state of insecurity and inability to move out due to the fear of their enemies should not deceive or discourage them because this state of affairs was only a transitory one (cf. *Tafsīr*, III:105).

41. According to al-Rāzī the expression "*bag͟hā 'alayhim* (he oppressed them)" means that he despised the poorer sections of the Israelites and did not give them their due on account of their faith. Another meaning given by him is that the Pharaoh placed him at the head of

the Israelites but he oppressed them. A third meaning given by Qaffāl is that he sought a superior position among the Israelites and desired that they should be placed under him. According to Ibn 'Abbās it means that he adopted an arrogant attitude towards the Israelites and despised them. Fifthly, according to Hawshab, it means that he put on rich flowing robes which drive men to arrogance. Seventhly, Kalbī says that he felt jealous of Aaron (Hārūn) because priesthood was vested in him. He said to Moses that he was a prophet and his brother Aaron was the priest but he (Korah) himself had no position. Therefore, he seceded from the Israelites (who followed Moses and Aaron) and had a large number of people with him, as he was extremely rich.

42. According to al-Rāzī worldly riches and material prospeirty are no sure guarantee against immunity from God's wrath if a people choose to disobey Him (cf. *Tafsīr*, V:552).

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTS OF HISTORY IN THE BIBLE AND THE QUR'ĀN

Among the religious scriptures of the world, the Qur'ān alone seeks to build up a consistent view of the factors which govern the fate of communities and nations and their well-being on Earth. It is true that the Qur'ān has nowhere devoted a special section to the purpose. Its remarks on the subject are interspersed throughout the whole Book and form a series of comments on the life-deeds of a number of ancient peoples. But when all these remarks are put together and viewed as a whole, a clear picture emerges of all those factors which, according to the Qur'ān, influence and shape the destiny of a nation or community in general. For example, the Qur'ān points to material prosperity and power and the self-conceit which they produce, when unaccompanied by a sense of humility and submission to God and the acknowledgement of His sovereignty as one of the powerful factors that contribute to the decadence of a people. Similarly, it refers to commercial malpractices as a symptom of decadence. Again, the Qur'ān says that nations have suffered destruction because they lacked a positive conception of virtue which consists not merely in doing what is right but also in trying to dissuade and prevent others from doing what is not right. The Qur'ān further emphasizes that the rise of faulty and corrupt leadership and its acceptance by the people is also a potent

cause of national misfortunes. The Qur'ān thus advocates a democratic framework of life in which leadership is subject to checks and controls. Above all, it says that injustice and tyranny are the worst enemies of social solidarity and inter-societal amity.

The Qur'ān does not, therefore, present us with a chronicle of events as such. It is not the history of a particular religious community, nor does it describe the career of any racial group and its progress towards greater solidarity or statehood. It goes much deeper and seeks to analyse the ideological and psychological foundations and the moral attitudes and habits issuing therefrom which bring power and prosperity to a nation or lead it to decay and culminate in its annihilation. It is true that Qur'ān refers to some facts of religious and political history, but its concern is not with the facts themselves so much as with the moral to which they point.

The Old Testament, on the other hand, gives us a narrative of the historical development of the Israelites in great detail, their exodus from Egypt, their conquest of Palestine, their defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the formation of the Davidic monarchy and the split between Israel and Judah, etc. But there are very few generalized statements as to what constituted their strength in the earlier period of their history and what led to their subjugation by foreign powers at a later date. On the other hand, the Old Testament contradicts in some places what it says in other places about the relation between God's treatment of Israel and Israel's conduct in respect of the covenants they had entered into with Jehovah and the commandments they were asked to observe in consequence of this covenant. The contradiction lies

in the fact that neither in the matter of punishment nor in that of reward does Jehovah seem to follow a law or principle with regard to Israel so that their historical fortunes vary not in accordance with their moral conduct but according to Jehovah's arbitrary will. Israel, being the chosen race of God, He goes out of His way to settle them in Palestine, in spite of their persistent disobedience and evil conduct. God even vindicates the holiness of His name by showing to the world what favours He can bestow on His people, despite their refusal to listen to His prophets and fulfil His commandments. For example, the Old Testament says: "Know therefore, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land, because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt, until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath and the Lord was so angry with you that He was ready to destroy you."[1] Similarly, the Old Testament contains a passage like the one: "Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel! that I am about to act but for the sake of My name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations will know that I am the Lord, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes. For I will take you among the nations and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will spring clean water upon you, and you shall be clear from all uncleanliness and from all your idols I will clear you. A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put with in you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful

to deserve My ordinances. You shall do well in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God."[2]

Such passages as these negate the very concept of *moral causation, namely, that human actions have their* corresponding effects, and that there is such a thing as the judgement of history in so far as the collective life of groups and nations is concerned. But if nations are to be judged not by their merits and demerits as they exhibit themselves in the actual course of history but by some special relationship to God, then it becomes very difficult to develop a satisfying concept of history such as may illustrate the working of the moral factor in the actual development of human affairs in so far as correspondence between cause and effect is concerned.

In spite of this contradiction it would not be correct to deny *in toto* that Old Testament contains a rudimentary idea of moral causes and their corresponding consequences which are at work in history. Only, this idea in the Old Testament is rather vague and not so definite as it is in the Qur'ān. For example, there is a passage in *Nehemiah* which says: "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against Thee and cast Thy law behind their backs, and killed Thy prophets, who had warned them in order to turn back to Thee, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore, Thou didst give them into the hands of their enemies, who made them suffer; and in the time of their suffering , they cried to Thee and didst hear them from Heaven; and according to Thy mercies, Thou didst give them saviours who saved them from the hands of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before Thee and Thou didst abandon

them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominated over them."[3] There are also in the Old Testament warnings against the social consequences of injustice and oppression: "For, if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever"[4] Therefore, while admitting that the Old Testament contains passages furnishing a rudimentary concept of history, it must be pointed out that such phrases as the "sin of Israel" or "acting corruptly"or "failing to keep the commands, statutes and ordinances of God" or "doing evil" do not give much insight into the factors which actualy determine the destinies of nations. They constitute vague hints as to the way in which a nation loses its power and glory rather than specific causes of national decay. Moreover, when by the side of such statements, we find that in spite of all the sins, rebellions and profanation of God's name of which Israel were guilty, their God gives them the promised land, cleans them of all moral impurities and declares them to be His own people, thus setting at nought the principle of Divine justice, it becomes very difficult to claim that the Old Testament furnishes the basis for framing a really consistent view of history.

Another important fact which should be mentioned in connection with the Old Testament is that it deals with the history and fortunes of a single race and group of people, namely, the Israelites. Therefore, it is difficult to derive a set of laws which govern history in general. A philosophy of history must take into account not merely the fortunes of one nation or a group of people but of many in order to

arrive at a set of principles which govern the process of history in general. In this respect, the Qur'ān is the only revealed Book which, because it takes into account the decline and decay of many ancient peoples, contains the germs out of which a philosophy of history can be developed.

When we come to the New Testament we find that it is the most unhistorical of the three religious scriptures with which we shall deal. There the life and death of a single individual occupies the centre of the stage and the canvas of history shrinks almost to the vanishing point. How a single individual came to dominate the scene of history in the Christian scheme of life has been explained by O. Cullmann in the following passage:

> "Man was meant to rule over the rest of creation. He fell, and this fall into sin involved the whole creation under the curse of God (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20). Out of sinful mankind God chose one group, the people of Israel, for the salvation of the world. Within this people, however, a further reduction takes place to a still smaller human community which is to fulfil the purpose of God— the 'remnant of Israel,' *qehal jahve.* This remnant once more is compressed and reduced to *one* man, who alone is able to take over Israel's function. He is the 'servant of Jahve' in II Isaiah, the 'Son of Man' in Daniel, who represents 'the people of the saints' (Dan. 7:13 ff). This single person must enter history in the Son of God, Christ, who through his vicarious death at last accomplishes the purpose for which God had chosen the people of Israel.... Now it becomes necessary, in a manner of speaking to reverse the process namely, to proceed from the One to the Many, but in such a way that *the Many*

> *represent the One*.... Thus the way leads to the Church, which is the body of the One; she is now to fulfil the task of 'the remnant'.... Thus the history of slavation runs its course in two movements. The first runs from the Many to the One. This is the Old Covenant. The other runs from the One to the Many. This is the New Covenant precisely in the middle is the decisive *factum*, the crucifixion of Christ."[5]

If this is the Christian concept of the historical process, it fails to carry conviction on two grounds. First, it places the history of mankind before the advent of Christ on a quite different footing from human history after his appearance on the world-scene. This bifurcation of history cannot be justified on rational grounds because the entire process of history forms one single whole. Unlike this Christian concept, the Qur'ān treats the entire history of mankind as one whole. The remarks made by the Qur'ān in regard to ancient Arabian nations, the Jews and the Christians, apply with equal force to the Muslim community. In fact, the comments of the Qur'ān on the life and conduct of the pre-Islamic peoples have been made for the purpose of warning the Muslims that if they fall into the same evil practices that caused the ruin of these pre-Islamic peoples they should not expect of God that He will treat them differently. There is, therefore, no bifurcation of the historical process in the Qur'ān.

The other grave defect of the Christian concept of history is that to which we have already drawn attention. History always means the life of individuals and groups in their interaction. No one individual, however good and

great he may be, can fulfil the purposes of God. It is true that the great spiritual leaders of humanity—whom we call the prophets—have done more in leading mankind to their true destination than an exclusively political or intellectual leadership can hope to do. But whatever has been accomplished by them has been the outcome of the willing co-operation offered to them by their following.

In the Christian concept of history, the sacrifice of one individual accomplishes without any corporate effort on the part of his following, the salvation of entire humanity. The Christians are required only to have faith in Christ and by this act of faith salvation is automatically achieved. But if salvation can come about in this manner, without moral effort and the practice of virtue in its collective sense, then it is a salvation that lies outside history. The Qur'ān, in the first place, does not put forward the negative concept of salvation. Its ideal is material as well as spiritual well-being and this can come about only through *jihād* which, in its widest sense, includes every organized and corporate effort at material and spiritual self-improvement. The Qur'ān sets forth the ideals of life and the values on which the corporate existence of the community is to be based. The prophet shows the way to the attainment of those ideals and exemplifies in his person the social virtues necessary for the success of the endeavour, but it is the community as a whole that has to achieve its own salvation and well-being. Not faith only but faith as well as deeds are necessary for the achievement desired.

Unlike the Qur'ān, which records the struggle of the Prophet of Islam and his Companions for the ideals which had been set out before them, a large part of the New Testament is filled with the miracles performed by Christ which

do not fall within the compass of history, because of their supernatural character. The New Testament is also devoid of any reference to the factors which govern human well-being in its collective aspect. This is quite natural, because Christ had no idea of forming a separate group or starting a movement distinct from the tradition in which he was born and brought up. His objective was a limited one, namely, that of raising the moral tone of the society and rescuing the individual from the literal observance of minor laws for the sake of building up a higer individual morality, even at the cost of social solidarity.[6]

The one fact that stands out clearly in regard to the New Testament is its supreme unconcern with the material well-being of man. Take a passage such as this "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither store-house nor barn, and yet God feeds them, of how much value are you than the birds: and which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin: yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass which is alive in the field today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he cloth you. O men of little faith? And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For all the nations

of the world seek these things; and your father knows that y
need them. Instead seek his kingdom, and these thin
shall be yours as well" (Luke 12:22 to 31). From this pa
sage it is clear that the New Testament makes a sharp contr
between this world and the Kingdom of Heaven, so th
any kind of activity directed towards bettering one's world
lot or even to providing oneself with the necessaries of li
becomes antithetical to the life of the spirit. This mea
that the New Testament does not take society seriously.
disregards completely the necessity of social co-operation, f
the need of co-operation can arise only in a society which giv
due importance to worldly life. In such a religious worl
view, it is in vain to look for a set of principles out of whi
a concept of history may be developed.

This sharp contrast between the Kingdom of Heav
and this world is grounded in the peculiar influences to whi
Jesus Christ was exposed at the time when his religious co
sciousness reached its full maturity. Spengler has very apt
pointed out that the world-view of Jesus can be understoc
only with reference to the teachings of John the Baptist w
exercised the most decisive influence on Jesus. Now Joh
the Baptist had weaned himself away from Judaism and w
filled with an intense hatred of the Jerusalem spirit: "To hi
came Jesus and was his disciple. He was thirty years o
when the awakening came over him. Thenceforth th
apocalyptic and, in particular, the Mandaean thought-wor
filled his whole being. The other world of historical actuali
lying around him was to him as something sham, alien, voi
of significance. That he would now come and make
end of this unreal reality was his magnificent certainty, an

like his master John, he stepped forth as its herald. Even now we can see, in the oldest Gospels that were embodied into the New Testament, gleams of this period in which he was in his consciousness, nothing but a prophet."[7]

Spengler goes on to remark that when Jesus Christ went about proclaiming his message he was confronted by the actuality of the Roman state and that of Pharisaism. What repulsed him was that the cold-hearted formulae of the latter should be considered as a guarantee of salvation. Still, thus far it was only the law versus the prophets.

"But when Jesus was taken before the Pilate, then *the world of facts and the world of truth were face to face in immediate and implacable hostility.* It is a scene appallingly distinct and overwhelming in its symbolism such as the world's history has never before and has never since looked at.... In the famous question of the Roman procurator: "What is truth?"—the one word that is race-pure in the whole Greek Testament—lies *the entire meaning of history*, the exclusive validity of the deed, the prestige of the state and war and blood, the all-powerfulness of success and the pride of eminent fitness. Not indeed the mouth but the silent feeling of Jesus answers this question by that other which is decisive in all things of religion—what is actuality? For Pilate, actuality was all; for him nothing. Were it anything, indeed, pure religiousness could never stand up against history and the powers of history, or sit in judgemnt on active life; or if it does, it ceases to be religion and is subjected itself to the spirit of history."[8]

With this last remark of Spengler, we do not cannot agree, for it implies and, indeed, expressly procl that religion has nothing to do with actuality. This is Plat idealism, pure and simple, and it means that reli has not come for men living in history but for spirits di bodied whose existence lies outside the process of hi There is no denying the fact that religion presents us the conception of an ideal world but this ideal world is large measure realizable here and now by changing the of life and using them in the pursuit of the ideal. Hi is a process in which ideality and actuality constantly anc peatedly interact with each other and sometimes they are terlocked in mutual conflict. The actual course of hi is the resultant of this ceaseless interaction and occasi conflict between ideality and actuality. The Christian ception of a Kingdom of Heaven which in its nature is unre able on this earth accepts this polarization and mutual sep tion of ideality and actuality and, by doing this, Christi renders itself trans-historical. Christianity, in effect, de the very existence of the historical process, which is the in action of the ideal and the actual.

It is for this reason that the New Testament does call for the realization of its ideals through active stru against the opposing forces, which seek to perpetuate actual, for if actuality is nothing, as Spengler says it nothing to Jesus Christ, there is no meaning in trying to ch or transform it and bring it in conformity with the ic The Kingdom of Heaven, being already an established and having been attained by a mere act of faith, ther nothing left except to accept the actual world as it is.

ideality which forms the presupposition of Christianity, on Spengler's view, amounts to a surrender to *life as it is*. There is, for this very reason, no sense of active struggle in the minds of the New Testament writers. The Christian scripture teaches an ethics of brotherly love, one which extends even to enemies. It makes no distinction between those whose enmity is based on personal or non-ideological reasons and those who not only do not hold but actively oppose the ideals preached by Christ, and whose enmity, therefore, is one which ought to call forth the active opposition of the Christians. Not only is the New Testament Christianity indifferent and neutral to the process of history, there is a section of opinion which holds that it is positively destructive of the historical sense of mankind. "The earliest manifestations of historical reflexion, however, were extinguished by Christianity and the great religious revolutions of antiquity. It is true that Christianity itself operated throughout with a historical conception of universal application and that for the purely anti-barbarian civilized state it substituted the central conception of humanity and a supreme ethical and religious end for the human race. These provided new and powerful incentives to historical reflection. In reality, they served to produce not a scientific but a revived mythological conception of history. The early Christian conception, alike as regards time and as regards space, was narrow in the extreme and was involved in all manner of purely speculative conception. the history of human race, with respect to its beginning and its end, was saturated with mythology, in the middle stood the miracle of incarnation and the rise of the Church. Interest was once more concentrated upon the inexplicable and the desire to

explain came to be regarded as the mark of a profane mind."[9] As far as the above statement is concerned we must emphasize the fact that whatever the attitude of other religions to history may have been, Islam quickened the sense of historical reflexion, instead of weakening it. This is evidenced by the historical writings produced by the Muslims of the later generations. It may be pointed out in this connection that the Muslims were the first people who initiated the vogue of writing universal histories. Before their time history had always been national or parochial history. The Muslims tried to trace back to the beginnings of Creation the history of the peoples who surrounded them.

NOTES

1. Deutronomy, 9:6.
2. Ezekiel, 36:22-23.
3. The Book of Nehemiah, 9:26-8.
4. Jeremiah, 7:5-7.
5. Karl Lowitch, *Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1958, p. 183.
6. It should be noted in this connection that although there is no proof that Jesus Christ was formally admitted to the order of Essenes, much in his life and activity can be explained on the presupposition that he had adopted their fundamental principles. Now, the majority of the Essenes seems to have wirthdrawn to a rather inhospitable district on the shores of the Dead Sea. They were communists, living in the houses owned by the community; their communal meals were regarded as a religious ceremony of prime importance. Not only did their communistic methods of production make slave labour superfluous, but they seem to have objected to the institution on egailtarian principles, They held in high esteem self-inflicted poverty and despised riches. With all that, the Essenes were Jews, even Pha-

risiac Jews. They observed the minutest details of the Pharisiac law. They were extreme pacifists, opposed to war as an evil in itself (see Salo Wittmayer Bason, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, New York 1952, ii: 149, 150). Another noteworthy fact was that "Jesus Christ made no attack upon Judaism itself, he had no idea of becoming the reformer of Jewish doctrines or the propounder of a new law; he sought merely to redeem the sinner, to call him to a good and holy life and to prepare him for the approaching Messianic time." (Salo Wittmayer Bason, *op. cit.*, p. 155.)

7. Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, tr. by C.F. Atkinson, London, 1954, pp. 214-15.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 215-16.
9. Article 'Historiograpny, in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion dnd Ethics* (1959), vol. VI.

CHAPTER III

COMMENTS OF THE QUR'ĀN ON ANCIENT ARABIAN HISTORY

We start our discussion of the Qur'ānic comments on ancient Arabian history by an account of these comments. We should begin this chapter with the story of Abraham, for by common consent, he was the progenitor of the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. The Qur'ān denies that there was anything specially Jewish or Christian about Abraham. "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but an upright man who had surrendered himself to God" (III:67). It further traces the origin of the Islamic *Ummah* (Community) to Abraham. "And strive in God's way the striving that is due to Him. He selected you and laid no hardship on you in religion; the community of your father Abraham" (XXII:78).

The first significant comments of the Qur'ān in regard to the life-history and the work of Abraham are meant to dispel the idea that any special virtue attaches to a race or family and that, in the struggle between good and evil, even blood relationship counts for little. God supports only the virtuous and does not help the evildoers, even if they belong to the race or the family of a prophet. "And (remember) when His Lord tried Abraham with (His) commands, and he fulfilled them. He said: Lo! I have appointed thee as a leader of mankind. Abraham said: And of my offspring will there be leaders? He said: My covenant includeth not the wrong-doers" (II:124).

In the opinion of al-Rāzī,[1] this verse constitutes a warning to the Jews, Christians and the polytheists that the good of this world and of the next cannot be earned except by giving up the disobedience of God, observing the Divine commands and fulfilling the obligations laid down by Him. Al-Rāzī further states that the jurists as well as people learned in the science of *Kalām* (scholasticism) have argued from this verse that it is not lawful to entrust the leadership (rulership) of the community to one who is a *Fāsiq* (a man of loose morals) so long as he remains in a state of immorality.

Al-Zamakhsharī[2] says in explanation of the verse that only those persons among the progeny of Abraham who can execute justice and are free from any taint of oppression will be elevated to the position of leadership. He further remarks that scholars have argued from this verse that a morally corrupt man is disqualified from leadership or (rulership) and the reason, he adds, is obvious. A person whose evidence in a law court is unacceptable, who is not considered worthy of obedience, whose information is not relied upon and who is not allowed to lead the prayers is hardly fit to assume the responsibilities of leadership.

Both al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī have interpreted the Qur'ānic remark, "My Covenant includeth not the wrong-doers" in a purely individual sense. But it can be equally well applied to societies and nations, and when so applied, it would mean that no nation can assume the leadership of mankind in the political, intellectual or cultural fields which is not free from the taint of injustice and oppression and whose rulers and leaders are morally corrupt. The reason is that

a society should possess a high degree of internal cohesion in order to be able to compete with others in the struggle for leadership. But internal cohesion requires justice in its widest sense, i.e., there should be economic justice as between the various classes. and political power should be diffused rather than concentrated so that every citizen feels that he has some say in the affairs of his country and society. This means that the structure of the society should be democratic, the rulers should be subject to certain checks and controls and freedom of expression should not be curbed in matters, political and intellectual, unless it constitutes an open incitement to rebellion, or undermines the spiritual and moral principles which the society regards as essential to its very existence. All this, however, would be possible only if the people who really count in society and direct its affairs in the social, political and intellectual fields are held together by convictions and principles which they refuse to surrender at any price.

Again, the Qur'ān says that God entrusted the leadership of His people to Abraham, when the latter successfully stood the tests prescribed for him: "And (remember) when his Lord tried Abraham with (His) commands, he fulfilled them. He said: Lo! I have appointed thee as a leader of mankind" (II:124). According to some commentators[3] the success of Abraham in these tests was proved by his refusal to worship the stars, the moon, and the sun, by his providential escape from the fire into which he was thrown, by his migration from his birthplace, and by his readiness to sacrifice his son at the command of God. Although the Qur'ān speaks of leadership in this place with particular reference to Abraham, it is a matter of common historical experience that as far as

nations and societies are concerned, the leadership of mankind goes to that society which can stand up for its principles and convictions, is able to undergo hardships, as Abraham did by migrating from his home town and which is ever ready for sacrifices in men and money, as was Abraham ready to sacrifice his son at the Divine command. Therefore, the Qur'ān is here stating, though not explicitly, that the historical process is selective in its nature in so far as the leadership of mankind is concerned. In other words, world leadership is conferred on those nations only which can stand the challenges and tests of history.

We now come to the most ancient Arabian nation on whose eventual disintegration the Qur'ān makes some important comments. The Qur'ān calls them 'Ād-Iram. "Dost thou not consider how thy Lord dealt with the tribe of 'Ād, with the multi-columned Iram, the like of which was not created in the lands" (LXXXIX:6-8). In one place the Qur'ān also calls them "the former 'Ādites". He destroyed the former 'Ādites (LIII:50). Who were these 'Ādites? According to all indications they were the descendants of Sām, són of Noah, and they had set up their kingdom within the Arabian Peninsula and jutting into the adjacent lands.[4] This is the opinion of Ibn Kat͟hir who says that their dwellings were situated in the Yemen and that the Prophet Hūd who was sent to them lies buried in the Yemen.[5]

According to the Qur'ān, the 'Ādites were a powerful people. "As for 'Ād, they were arrogant in the land without right, and they said: Who is mightier than us in power?" (XLI:15). It is quite probable that they had built up a strong empire.

Another comment of the Qur'ān in regard to the 'Ādites is that they passed their lives in utter forget-fulness of the Day of Reckoning. "Build ye on every high place a monument for vain delight? And seek ye out strongholds, that haply ye may last for ever? And if ye seize by force, seize ye as tyrants"? (XXVI:128-30). This means that while the present life is important in a way, to lose oneself completely in it and forget the infinite life that is to come, is fatal in the long run, to the happiness and prosperity of this very life. Moreover, according to the Qur'ānic concept of history, the pursuit of material values as ends in themselves diminishes the chances of the survival of any group which adopts such a way of life. The 'Ādites perished because of their exclusive pre-occupation with the pursuit of worldly glory. The Qur'ān also says that the 'Ādites had grown very proud of their power. "As for 'Ād, they were arrogant in the land without right, and they said: Who is mightier than us....could they not see that Allāh Who created them? He was mightier than them in power?" (XLI:15). Their Prophet Hūd, reminded them that it was not a matter of pride but one of gratitude to God that they had been blessed with so many gifts: "keep your duty towards Him Who hath aided you with (the good things) that ye know, hath aided you with cattle and sons and gardens and water-springs" (XXVI:132-4). This means that the gifts bestowed by God on the 'Ādites, instead of making them subservient to God and obedient to His law, produced the reverse effect, that is, made them proud, arrogant and tyrannical in relation to others. From this it may be inferred that wealth, prosperity, scientific or technological skill and the military as well as the economic strength

that follows from them may actually undermine the spiritual strength and moral fibre of a society, unless there goes with it a deep-seated realization that the source of all these things lies above man and above nature, that is, in the Divine Being, to Whose law man must submit and the idea of Whose Might and Majesty should create in him a feeling of humility and a sense of creatureliness resulting in mutual love and brotherhood in the members of the society.

The next Arabian people mentioned by the Qur'ān are the Thamūdites.[6] The Qur'ān makes the following observations about them: "And to (the tribe of) Thamūd (We sent) their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said: "O my people! serve Allāh! Ye have no other God save Him....And remember how He made you viceroys after 'Ād and gave you station in the earth. You choose castles in the plains and hew the mountains into dwellings; so remember (all) the bounties of Allāh, and do not do evil, making mischief in the earth. The chieftains of his people, who were scornful, said unto those whom they despised, unto such of them as believed: know ye that Ṣāliḥ is one sent from his Lord" (VII: 73-5).

And again, "(the tribe of) Thamūd denied the messengers (of Allāh) when their brother Ṣāliḥ, said unto them: Will ye not ward off (evil)? Lo! I am a faithful messenger unto you, so keep your duty to Allāh and obey me and I ask of you no wage therefor; my wage is the concern only of the Lord of the worlds. Will ye be left secure in that which is here before us, in gardens and water springs and tilled fields and heavy sheathed palm-trees, though ye hew out dwellings in the mountains, being skilful. Therefore, keep your duty

to Allāh and obey me, And obey not the command of the prodigal, who spread corruption in the earth, and reform not" (XXVI:141-52).

According to al-Rāzī, these verses furnish proof of the fact that poverty is better than riches, in as much as the feeling of pride and superiority and the habit of despising others is the direct outcome of too much wealth and an excessive desire for worldly power and prestige. But the fact of being despised is the result of the absence of these things. Therefore, God has made it clear that excess of wealth, worldly power and social respect led them to follow the path of arrogance, denial and disbelief, while the lack of wealth and respect led the other group to belief and obedience.[7]

Al-Rāzī[8] further remarks that the verses of the Qur'ān with regard to the people of 'Ād and the people of Ṣāliḥ show that the people of 'Ād were overcome by the desire for immediate pleasures and these were the love of supremacy, self-aggrandizement and of arrogating all power and glory to themselves without sharing them with others as well as of domineering over their neighbours. The people of Ṣāliḥ were overcome by sensual pleasures such as the love for food and drink and comfortable places of residence. Again, he adds that the verse, "Do not obey the commands of the prodigals" means that one should be satisfied with the world so long as one's necessities are met and it is not lawful to desire more of one's share of worldly goods and comforts with a view to satisfying one's carnal desires.

The above comments of al-Rāzī on the Qur'ānic verses about the Thamūdites cannot be accepted without qualification.

It is not true that lack of wealth and social respect always induce people to follow the right path or accept the right beliefs. What is true, however, is that whenever some new religious or spiritual movement arises under the leadership of an inspiring person it is always the poorer people who are the first to espouse it and form the main support of the movement. In other words, it is much easier to enlighten people who lack worldly power and position than those who are in enjoyment of power and riches.

As far as the Thamūdites are concerned, what the Qur'ān wants to bring home to its readers is that their wealth and prosperity had made them oblivious of the higher values of life. They had forgotten that there is a power beyond human power which takes account of man's deeds and from whose ever vigilant eye it is impossible to escape. Secondly, the leadership which they followed was leading them astray and had made them corrupt. From this we conclude that, besides other factors in the process of national decay to which the Qur'ān refers, one important factor is the rise of faulty leadership and the people's acceptance thereof.

Another Arabian people which the Qur'ān has dealt with are the Midianites to whom the Prophet Shu'āyb addressed himself. They were closely related to the Israelites. Their country lay between the Gulf of 'Aqabah and the Red Sea. They lived in close proximity to both the Ismāīlite Arabs and the Israilites, to both of whom they were closely related by the bonds of kinship, being the descendants of Abraham by his third wife. When Moses fled from Egypt, he took refuge among the Midianties whcse chief gave his daughter

in marriage to him.[9] The story is described by the Qur'ân in the following verses:

> "And when he turned his face towards Midian, he said: Peradventure my Lord will guide me in the right road. And when he came unto the water of Midian, he found there a whole tribe of men, watering. And he found apart from them two women keeping back (their flocks). He said: What aileth you? The two said: We cannot give (our flocks) to drink till the shepherds return from the water; and our father is a very old man. So he watered (their flock) for them. Then he turned aside into the shade, and said: My Lord! I am needy of whatever good thou sendest down for me. Then there came unto him one of the two women, walking shyly. She said: Lo! my father biddeth thee, that he may reward thee with a payment for that thou didst water (the flock) for us. Then, when he came unto him and told him the (whole) story, he said: Fear not! Thou has escaped from the wrong-doing folk" (XXVIII: 22-5).

The Qur'ân gives a more detailed account of the causes which eventually brought them to their doom. The following verses throw sufficient light on the moral evils which had taken hold over these people:

> "And unto Midian (We sent) their brother, Shu'eyb. He said: O my people! serve Allâh. You have no other God save Him. Lo! a clear proof hath come unto you from your Lord; so give full measure

> and full weight and wrong not mankind in their goods, and work not confusion in the earth after the fair ordering thereof. That will be better for you, if ye are believers. Lurk not on every road to threaten (wayfarers), and to turn away from Allāh's path him who believeth in Him and to seek to make it crooked. And remember, when ye were but few, how He did multiply you. And see the nature of consequences for the corrupters!" (VII:85-6).

And again:

> "And unto Midian (We sent) their brother Shu'eyb. He said: O my people! serve Allāh. Ye have no other God save Him. And give not short measure and short weight. Lo! I see you well-to-do and lo! I fear for you the doom of a besetting Day. O my people! give full measure and full weight in justice and wrong not people in respect of their goods. And do no evil in the earth, causing corruption. That which Allāh leaveth with you is better for you if ye are believers; and I am not a keeper over you. They said: O Shu'eyb! Doth thy way of prayers command thee that we should forsake that which our fathers (used to) worship, or that we should leave off doing what we will with our own property. Lo! thou art the mild, the guide to right behaviour" (XI:84-7).

Commenting on the latter verses, al-Rāzī says that the Prophet Shu'eyb warned them against raising prices artificially, as if he said to them, "give up this habit of giving short measure, otherwise God will take away from you

what He has given you by way of wealth and comfort; secondly, it may mean that because God has been so good to you, having given you wealth, cheap living and ample means, therefore, there is no need for you to resort to the practice of giving short measure. As regards the verse, "That which Allāh leaveth with you is better for you", al-Rāzī says that the meaning of this verse is that which God leaves with you in a lawful manner after you have given full measure and weight to the buyers is far better than robbing people of their goods or giving them short measure. Al-Rāzī further adds that, in the opinion of Ḥasan, it means that obedience to God's commands (of which the reward is eternal) is better than the small gain you make. But I say that the remainder means either the reward of God or the fact that you enjoy God's pleasure, both of which are better than the gain accruing from the practice of giving short measure, because when people come to recognize a man as being truthful and trustworthy and far removed from the habit of dishonesty, they begin to trust him and refer all their affairs to him. This causes the doors of sustenance to open upon him, but when people find that a man is dishonest and used to unfair means they leave him and stop mixing with him. The result is that the doors of sustenance close in upon him.[10]

Ibn 'Asākir says, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that Shu'eyb was the Prophet who came after Joseph. One of the practices of the people, to whom Shu'eyb was sent, was that when a stranger came to their place, they took his dirhams (i.e. the coins he brought with him) and told him that those dirhams (coins) were counterfeited, they then cut them and purchased them at a lower price causing loss to the

stranger. This is the meaning of the verse, "Do not corrupt the land after it has been rendered wholesome". Their cities were visited by people in order to obtain and purchase grain. Therefore, they used to sit on highways and prevent men from listening to Shu'eyb, saying that he was a liar.[11]

There is strong evidence that the facts given by Ibn 'Asākir are true. The Midianites were really Arabs and since Moses fled from Egypt to Midian, it seems probable that the Prophet of the Midianites, Shu'eyb, came after Joseph, because the next in the line of succession among the Prophets was Moses himself who got married among the Midianites.

Leaving aside the facts of history, the above verses of the Qur'ān throw considerable light on the causes which resulted in the extinction of the Madianites. First, it is clear that commercial malpractices were widespread. The business community indulged in profiteering and put the consumers at a disadvantage by resorting to many unfair devices among which two have been expressly mentioned by the Qur'ān, namely, that in measuring out and weighing they were guilty of dishonesty, as they gave the purchaser less by weighing and measuring short. The consumer did not get the full value of his money. But the Qur'ān does more than merely point to unfair commercial practices. It says: Wrong not mankind in their goods", or more precisely rendered "Do not defraud people of their possessions". This is a far more general remark and covers all forms of unfair commercial and industrial practices such as profiteering, thus incapacitating people from purchasing the same amount

of goods that they used to do before the rise in the prices cause under these conditions the purchasing power of people decreases, unless their incomes too rise proportiona which seldom happens, since even with the best intentior the world, it is difficult to raise the incomes of the peop proportion to the rise in prices. All these practices be a fundamental dishonesty in business dealings which is c capable of influencing other spheres of conduct, for if a is dishonest in one sphere of life, it is most likely that he begin acting dishonestly in other spheres too. Moral li a unified field. Therefore, if moral depravity takes hold man in one area of conduct, its influence will most prob spread to other spheres, for it is an absolutely mistaken that there is a specific business morality which can be str set apart from other fields of moral life.

Another evil has been mentioned by the Qur'ān connection with the punishment meted out to the Mi nites. Their Prophet says: "Lurk not on every roac threaten wayfarers and to turn away from Allāh's path who believeth in Him." This shows that economic p perity had created among the Midianites a class of ic who did no useful work in an economic or spiritual s and employed their time and leisure hours in threate people, if they were inclined to follow the lead of the Pro Shu'eyb. It could not have been that the Midianites reso to threatening the people, because they were poor and un ployed, for only the powerful can threaten those whom consider weak.

Another important characteristic of the Midiar mentioned by the Qur'ān is that in matters of religion

blindly followed their ancestors and turned a deaf ear to the call of their Prophet to follow a more exalted form of religious belief and worship and that they would brook no restrictions on the way in which they should use their property. "Doth thy way of prayer command thee that we should forsake that which our forefathers (used) to worship or that we should leave off doing what we will with our property" was the remark they made. This clearly shows that they had lost all idea of human accountability to God. When property is considered to belong solely to its owner which he can dispose of at will, when all idea of social responsibility disappears, when people are not prepared to part with their wealth for the sake of their less unfortunate brethren except under some coercion, governmental or otherwise, it means that moral corruption and spiritual degradation has struck deep in the people's mind and they are already past all reform.

A people closely allied to the Midianites were the people of the woods of whom the Qur'ān speaks in the following verses:

> "The dwellers in the wood (of Midian) denied the messengers (of Allāh), when Shu'eyb said unto them: Will ye not ward off (evil)? Lo! I am a faithful messenger unto you; so keep your duty to Allāh and obey me. And I ask of you no wage for it; my wage is the concern only of the Lord of the Worlds. Give full measure, and be not of those who give less (than the due) and weigh with the true balance. Wrong not mankind in their goods, and do no evil, making mischief, in the earth" (XXVI:176-83).

Commenting on these verses, al-Suyūṭī expresses the opinion, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, that the people of the wood lived on the sea-coast toward Midian and that in their polytheistic beliefs and practices, they followed the Midianites. They rejected Shu'eyb who was sent as a prophet to them as well as to the Midianites. Therefore, a poisonous wind blew in upon them, which made their house too hot for them and made water in wells unfit to drink. Thereupon, they fled from their homes but God brought the hot sun to beat on their heads and made the sand under their feet too hot until the flesh of their feet was separated from the bones and fell away. In this way, they all perished but Shu'ayb and those who believed in him were saved.[12]

Al-Rāzī's comments on the verse "do no evil, making mischief in the land" is that this refers to highway robbery and the destruction of crops to which these people were habituated.

The Qur'ān offers a much more detailed comment on the Sabā'ites,[13] a South Arabian nation which rose to prosperity long after the 'Ādites, the Thamūdites and Midianites had perished. "There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling place: two gardens on the right hand and on the left (as who should say): eat of the provision of your Lord and render thanks to Him. A fair land and an indulgent Lord! But they turned aside, so We sent on them the flood of Iram, and in exchange for their two gardens,[14] gave them two gardens bearing bitter fruit, the tamarisk and here and there a lote-tree. This we awarded them because of their ingratitude. Punish We ever any save the ingrates?" (XXXIV: 15-17).

Al-Rāzī's comment on these verses is that when God narrated the condition of those who had been grateful to Him for His gifts, i.e., people like David and Solomon, He narrated therewith the condition of those who had been guilty of ingratitude. Al-Zamakhsharī adds, al-Rāzī has raised the question as to what constituted the sign in these two gardens, when some cities of Iraq contain as many as thousands of gardens, and his reply to his own question is that each of these two gardens on the left and on the right of their city was really a collection of a large number of gardens adjacent to each other, so that taken together, they constituted one garden each. The Qur'ān further makes it clear that God created for them all the conditions necessary for the enjoyment of the Divine gifts. That is, why it speaks of a "fair land" meaning that their city was free from all injurious things. There were neither snakes in it nor serpents, it was never visited by an infectious disease. Its climate rendered it immune from such diseases. Again, the Qur'ān speaks of an indulgent Lord, which means that there will be no punishment for it, nor any kind of retribution in the hereaftre, if it follows the path of righteousness. This is the highest favour which God can do to a people, i.e., bestowing a happiness which is free from all corruption. On the other hand, when God made it clear as to what He had done on His side for them, He also stated, what the reaction of these people had been, i.e., "they turned aside and so we sent the flood on them.. Thus we awarded them for their ingratitude. Punish We save the ingrates." Thus God made it clear that they had been guilty of extreme wrong-doing in turning away from God.

Ibn Kaṯhīr says, on the authority of Qatādah, that the fruit-culture of the Sabā'ites had reached such a state of perfection that a woman would walk under the fruit-laden trees with a basket and the fruits of the trees would fall down in it and fill it without her having to exert herself. The famous dam (*Sadd Ma'ārib*) was situated at a distance of three days' journey between Ma'ārib and Ṣan'ā. Others, says Ibn Kaṯhīr,[16] state that their city was totally free from all kinds of pests and insects such as mosquitoes, etc., and this was due to the moderation of the climate and other factors, but the main cause of all this was the mercy of God, so that they might worship none save Him and obey His commands, as is evident from the verse, "there was a sign for the Sabā' in their abodes".

This has been explained in the following verse that "there were two gardens, one on the left and the other on the right", that is, one on the side of each mountain with their capital situated between them. Then it has been stated, "Eat of the provision of your Lord and be thankful that you have a fine city and an indulgent Lord", which means that He will be indulgent to you, so long as you keep to the monotheistic faith. Then God's statement that they turned aside means that they turned aside from belief in one God and His worship and obedience and from thankfulness for the gifts bestowed on them. Instead, they began to worship the sun, as the bird (*hudhud*) sent by Solomon told him, "Lo! I found a woman ruling over them, and she hath been given (abundance) of all things and her's is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun, instead of Allāh, and Satan maketh their works fair-seeming unto them

and debarreth them from the way (of truth) so that they go not aright" (XXVII:23-4). Ibn Kathīr also quotes Muḥammad b. Isḥāq on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih that God sent to them thirteen prophets and adds that, according to Sadī, twelve thousand prophets were sent to them, but Ibn Kathīr says that the truth is not known and God knows better.

It is clear from the account given by the Qur'ān and its commentators in regard to the Sabā'ites that the latter had been very prosperous at a particular period of their history. But later on, they were ruined, because the Qur'ān says that they were ungrateful to God and turned aside from Him. How actually, this turning aside took place, we are not told in detail, but as the commentators have said, they began to worship the sun in place of the one God whom they worshipped. Another fact which al-Rāzī has brought out is that their gardens yielded fruits so long as they worked on the land. But afterward people stopped working and the gardens were left neglected for many years. Both these facts are interconnected and highly relevant to our thesis, because the worship of one true God to Whom man surrenders himself creates in him a sense of humility and saves him from pride. But when man forgets God and gives up submission to His law, he develops a sense of pride which, in turn, makes him over-confident of his own power and strength. The result is that he becomes careless and slothful: and this is what actually seems to have happened in the case of the Saba'ites and this was what constituted their turning aside as mentioned by the Qur'ān.

In connection with the Sabā'ites, the Qur'ān narrates

in detail the story[17] of the Queen of Sheba and how she came to visit Solomon. This story is pertinent to our subject, because it throws light on the Qur'ānic conception of prophethood and the kind of attitudes that the prophets desired to inculcate. Briefly, the story is that one of the birds of Solomon (for he had control over birds also) informed him of a woman of Sabā' (Sheba) who was ruling a great country and had a mighty throne, but she was a worshipper of the sun and going the wrong way. Solomon gave the bird a letter to be thrown before the Queen and he waited to see what reply she would give. The Queen, after consulting her counsellors who advised her to adopt a stiff attitude, decided to propitiate Solomon and send him presents. "So when (the envoy) came unto Solomon, (the king) said: What! Would ye help me with wealth? But that which Allāh hath given me is better than that which He hath given you. Nay, it is ye (and not I) who exult in your gifts. Return unto them. We verily shall come unto them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from thence with shame, and they will be abased. He said: O chiefs! which of you will bring me her throne before they come unto me surrendering? A stalwart of the Jinn said: I will bring it thee before thou canst rise from thy place. Lo! I am verily strong and trusty for such work. One with whom was knowledge of the Book said: I will bring it thee before thy gaze returneth unto thee. And when he saw it set in his presence, (Solomon) said: This is of the bounty of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or am ungrateful. Whosoever giveth thanks, he only giveth thanks for (the good of) his own soul and whosoever is ungrateful (is ungrateful only to his own soul's hurt). For lo!

my Lord is absolute in independence, Bountiful. He said: camouflage her throne for her so that we may see whether she will go aright or be of those not rightly-guided. So, when she came, it was said (unto her): Is thy throne like this? She said: (It is) as though it were the very one. And (Solomon said): We were given the knowledge before her and we had surrendered (to Allāh). And (all) that she was wont to worship instead of Allāh hindered her, for she came of disbelieving folk. It was said to her: enter the hall. And when she saw it she deemed it a pool and bared her legs. (Solomon) said: Lo! it is a hall, made of smooth glass. She said: My Lord! Lo! I have wronged myself and I surrender with Solomon unto Allāh the Lord of the Worlds" (XXXII: 36-44).

The above story has not been narrated by the Qur'ān merely to make a show of Solomon's worldly grandeur and vast possessions or his desire for extending his territory. It is not aimed at impressing the reader with the fact that powerful monarchs like the Queen of Sheba, were so much overawed by the worldly splendour of Solomon that they tried to propitiate him with gifts. The object of the Qur'ān, on the contrary, in giving this story is to show that spirituality does not consist necessarily in self-inflicted poverty but in remaining true to God, true to oneself and to the moral law even when one is surrounded by all manner of temptations, such as wealth, kingdom, worldly power and fame and the charm exerted by the presence of the other sex.

NOTES

1. Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Cairo, 1307 A.H., i:473-80.

2. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, Cairo, 1354 A.H., 92:i.

3. The Muslim commentators have variously explained the tests which God set for Abraham. The best interpretation seems to be that God set a test for Abraham, in respect of seven matters, in regard to the stars, the moon and the sun (which were worshipped by his people, but to which he refused to do obeisance). Then he was tried with fire, migration and the sacrifice of his son (*Tafsīr al-Khāzin* Cairo, 1307 A.H., i:80). This interpretation seems far more rational than any other put forward by the Muslim commentators because the Qur'ān itself refers to the practice of star-worship which prevailed among the people from whom Abraham sprang. "And lo, of his persuasion verily was Abraham when he came unto his Lord with a whole heart: when he said to his father and his folk: what is it that ye worship? Is it a false god besides Allāh that ye desire? What then is your opinion of the Lord of the Worlds? And he glanced a glance at the stars. Then said: Lo! I feel sick. And they turned their back and went away from him. Then he turned to their gods and said: Will ye not eat? What aileth ye that ye speak not? Then he attacked them striking with his right-hand. And his people came to him hastening. Worship ye that ye yourself do carve, when Allāh created you and what ye make (XXXVII:83-96). Commenting on the verses, al-Rāzī says that God's saying that Abraham came to his Lord with a whole heart includes, among other things, the fact that he invited his father to his own monotheism. As regards the verse that he glanced a glance at the stars, al-Rāzī says that his people practised astrology and used to divine the future by reading the stars. Therefore, Abraham acquired proficiency in astrology and that is the meaning of the expression that he glanced at the stars. Then he decided to play a trick upon them so that he might furnish a proof of the unworthyness of stars as objects of worship. The next day, being a day of festival, he decided to remain in the temple after the people had gone home. Therefore, he feigned that he was sick (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-3).

4. Maulānā Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī says that the 'Ādites ruled not only Yeman, but also Babylon, Syria and, for a time, Egypt. He is of the opinion that the Amalekites, spoken of in the Old Testament, and the Hyksos rulers of Egypt were 'Ādites (cf. *Arḍ al-Qur'ān*, Lands of the Qur'ān (in Urdu), A'zamgadh, 1955, pp. 132-62).

Ibn Khaldūn says that there is no such city as Iram and this is but a fabrication of the story-tellers from whom the unauthoritative commentators of the Qur'ān have drawn their material. The Iram mentioned in the Qur'ān, he adds, is a tribe, not a city (*Kitāb al-'Ibar*, Cairo, 1355 A.H., i:28-9).

Further light on Ibn Khaldūn's comments referred to above is thrown by the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. The article on Hyksos says, "As to the name of the invaders, the first syllable is obviously the Egyptian "Heq", 'ruler', the second may conceivably be *shasu*, which was the generic Egyptian title for the pastoral races of the Eastern desert. Khayan names himself "Heq Setu", chief of the deserts and perhaps the derivation may lie here. But, on the whole, Manetho's derivation seems to be not far astray. There is no portrait evidence existing as to the race type, the sphinxes and other statues exhibiting a peculiar type of face, which formerly assigned to them being now considered to be older (Edinburgh, 1959, vol. VI). According to al-Suyūṭī, the Prophet Hūd who was sent to the 'Ādites was the first person who spoke Arabic and it is further stated by him that the 'Ādites were worshippers of idols, the names of some of whom are mentioned in the Qur'ān. The Prophet Hūd called him to the worship of one God and to desist from wrong-doing and oppression. He did not call upon them to pray or to observe any system of laws. But they rejected him and boasted of their power and strength. At the same time they created disorder in the land and vanquished its people (al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Cairo, 1314 A.H., iii:95).

With regard to the Qur'ānic verse, "And if ye seize by force, seize ye as tyrants)" (XXVI:130), al-Rāzī says that the verse shows that in dealing with others, the 'Ādites acted like tyrants. The import of these verses, adds al-Rāzī, may be summed up thus that the construction of palatial buildings shows their love of worldly glory,

while the building of strong-holds manifests their desire for self-perpetuation, and the display of tyrannical power shows that they wished to have a monopoly of worldly prestige and glory. But, al-Rāzī goes on to comment, these qualities belong to the Divine being and are impossible of attainment by the humans. This means that the love of life and of the world had so far taken prossession of their souls as to place them beyond the bounds of creatureliness and embolden them to claim a kind of divinity (al-Rāzī,: *op. cit.*, vi:360).

5. Ibn Kaṯhīr, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1370 A.H., ii:244.
6. According to Hitti, "Sargon II (722-705 B.C.), the conqueror of Carchemish and Samaria, reports that in the seventh year of his reign, he subjugated the tribes of Tamud (Ṯhamūd of the Qur'ān) "Who inhabit the desert, who know neither high nor low official", struck them down and deported the remnants to Samaria (P. K. Hitti, *A History of the Arabs*, New York, 1960, p. 37). This refers, however, to those Ṯhamūdites who had escaped destruction in the first period of their history and who succeeded in preserving some kind of integrity. The Ṯhamūdites whom the Qur'ān refers to were a much more powerful nation who had built up a splendid civilization. The Qur'ān refers really to these earlier Ṯhamūdites who were in occupation of the Northern and Western parts of Arabia, which was called Wādī al-Qurā'. The same Wādī (valley) has been referred to by the Qur'ān in the verse "Dost thou not consider how thy Lord dealt with the tribe of 'Ād, with the many-columned Iram, the like of which was not created in the lands: and with (the tribe) of Ṯhamūd who clove the rocks in the valley" (XXXIX:7-9). According to S. Sulaymān Nadwī, not much is known about the history of the Ṯhamudites except that it was a powerful nation of Northern Arabia and like its predecessors, the 'Ādites it had acquired great skill in architecture, specially in carving out the mountains to build residential palaces (Sulaymān Nadwī. *op. cit.*, p. 186).
7. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, iv; 252.
8. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, vi:36.
9. Regarding the civilization of Midianites and their moral and religious condition, Sulaymān Nadwī says that the Midianites lived in the

neighbourhood of Moabites and, morally as well as religiously, were at the same level. Ba'al-worship was common to both of them. Female chastity was a rare phenomenon. When the Israelites came forth from Egypt they encamped in the plains of the Moabites and Midianites. The women of these two peoples began to corrupt the young Israelite soldiers and Ba'al-worship spread among them. Israelite soldiers rebelled against their military chiefs. Therefore, Moses had to send a punitive expedition against them as a result of which the Midianite power was crushed (Sulaymān Nadw,ī *op. cit.*, ii:7).

The Old Testament mentions seven daughters of the Priest of Midian who came to draw water from the well but were driven away by shepherds. However, Moses helped them. For this act of kindness, Moses was invited by the Priest to his house, and eventually married his daughter Zipporah to him. The name of the Priest has been stated as Iethro (*Exodus*, ii, 16-21 and iii, I).

10. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, v:81.
11. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Cairo, 1314 A.H., iii:346-7.
12. *Ibid.*, 93.
13. Who were these Sabā'ites and when did they flourish, opinions differ. The article on Ṣabeans (in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*) says, "Was it (i.e. the Minean Kingdom) earlier than, or contemporary with, the Ṣabeans? Epigraphic considerations suggested that it was at least no earlier. Strabo's authority is quite familiar with the Mineans and regards them as one of the nations of Yemen. On the other side, it is argued that for several hundred years they held a commanding position in Northern Arabia and yet they are never mentioned at least by name in the Assyrian records. Therefore, their power must have come to an end before the arms of Assyria reached so far. But it has been mentioned that Assurbanipal probably came in contact with them. Possibly Itamara was the Sabean official of a Minean king. Sabā' is occasionally mentioned in Minean inscriptions but Ma'īn never in the Ṣabean. Therefore, Ma'īn was finished as a kingdom......"

    Perhaps the Mukarribs were the vassals of Ma'īn. They dwelt in Sirwāh, their family fortess. When they took the title of king, they shifted their residence to Ma'ārib.

Some of the later monuments are dated according to an era of their own. One from Ḥiṣn al-Ghurāb refers to events that are known from other sources to have happened in A.C. 525. That puts the first Ṣabean era in 115 or 114 B.C. It is only a guess, though plausible, that this is the year of upheaval in the state when the new little "King of Sabā and Raidan" appears. The period that ended about this time was that of Sabā's glory.

To it we owe the reference in the prophets to the omnipresent activity of Ṣabean merchants" (*Enycclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. X, Edinburgh, 1956).

According to Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, the Sabā'ites were descended from 'Abd Shams whose surname was Sabā. The chronology given by the Arab historians would fix the period of the Sabā'ites from 2500 B.C. But this, he adds, is wrong. His own opinion, he says, is that since the Sabā'ites are mentioned by David, therefore, their beginnings go only as farback as 1100 B.C. Regarding the prosperity of the Sabā'ites, Sulaymān Nadwi quotes Eratosthenes as saying that their capital was Ma'arib and their country had plenty of rainfall in the hot season which had made the land so fertile that there were two crops every year. He further quotes Agarthachides as saying that the country of the Sabā'ites grew many kinds of fruits. The river banks were lined with beautiful trees. Inside the country there are thick forests of spices and palm trees which give forth a sweet smell. Innumerable varieties of trees are also found at different places; people living near the sea-cost or passing by it can smell the fragrance they give forth, whenever the sea-breeze comes their way" (Sulaymān Nadwī, *op. cit.*, i; 352-3).

Ibn Kathir's account of the origin of the Sabā'ites is that according to those well versed in the Science of genealogy, 'Sabā' was the name given to the son of Yashhabb, Ya'rab b. Qaḥṭān. He was also called Ra'ish, because he was the first person who seized much booty in a local war and distributed it to the people. He was, therefore, given the name of Ra'ish and, it should be noted, that the Arabs use the word 'Ra'ish' and 'Riyash' for wealth and property. As regards Qaḥṭān, he says, there are three opinions, the first being that he was descended from Iram, son of Sām, son of Noah, Another school holds that he was descended from 'Ābir, i.e. Hūd. A third opinion

is that he was descended from Ishmael, son of Abraham. Ibn Kathīr further quotes a *Ḥadīth*, according to which someone asked the Prophet whether Sabā was a city, a man or a woman. The Prophet replied that he was a man who had ten sons, six of whom are settled in the Yemen, while four are settled in Syria. The Yemenites are the Modhhaj, Kindah, Azd, Ash'arīs, Anmār and Himyar, the Syrians are Lakhm, Jadham, Ghassān and Āmilah (Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1375 A.H., iii:531-2).

14. As regards the statement of the Qur'ān that in "exchange of the two gardens he gave them two gardens bearing bitter fruit, the tamarisk and here and there a lote tree," al-Rāzī adds that this verse shows that the whole system of irrigation and farming had been shattered beyond repair, and this happened when the gardens which yielded the fruits (because the people worked on the land) were left uncared for many years, they became like thickets in which the trees got intertwined with each other and this caused many plant diseases resulting in the low yield of fruits and the multiplication of trees whose fruits could not be eaten (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, vii:9).
15. *Ibid.*
16. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, iii:532.
17. The Old Testament version of the same story is different and this difference emphasizes a distinction in the spiritual outlook of the two Scriptures. The Old Testament says nothing about the letter addressed to the Queen of Sheba by Solomon or of the way in which her throne was brought to the latter, nor of the information gathered by Solomon's omissary in regard to the religion of the Queen. The Old Testament also does not mention Solomon's threat to conquer her kingdom and her reaction to it. According to the Qur'ān, the Queen sent her presents through an envoy. But Solomon was not impressed by her wealth and riches. Like a true Prophet, he showed his disdain of worldly wealth and was not entied by it, for his object was to bring her to the true religion. This is clearly mentioned in the Qur'ān in the verse, "He said: disguise her throne for her that we may see whether she will go aright or be of those not rightly guided." This spiritual note is missing from the Old Testament, according to which the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon of her own accord when

she heard of the fame, riches and wisdom of Solomon. Her object was to test him with some hard questions. Solomon, it is said, answered all her questions and there was nothing hidden from him which he could not explain. And when the Queen saw his wisdom and glory, there was no more spirit left in her. Her parting remarks, as narrated by the Old Testament are, "Happy are your wives. Happy are these your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the Lord your God, who had delighted in you and set you on throne of Israel. Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness. Then she gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold and a very great quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again came such an abundance of spices as these which the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon" (*Kings*, X, 1-10).

Thus, the Old Testament version contains no hint of the conversion of the Queen of Sheba nor of the fact that Solomon showed his disdain of the costly gifts brought by her, remarking that what God had given him was much better than all that was sent by her. The remarks of Solomon, given in the Qur'ān, "This is of the bounty of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or am ungrateful", which are pregnant with a deep moral import are also missing in the Old Testament. The fact is that the Qur'ān portrays Solomon as a spiritual leader who seeks to bring men and women within the fold of true religion and whose soul remains uncorrupted by worldly power and riches.

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CHAPTER IV

COMMENTS OF THE QUR'ĀN ON JEWISH HISTORY

SECTION A

Although the Prophet Noah does not fall strictly under Jewish history, which begins with Abraham, we include an account of his mission in this chapter, because he was a predecessor of Abraham and has been mentioned in the Old Testament. The Qur'ān says nothing about the time and place in which Noah lived. Perhaps the Arabs were familiar with these things. Nor does it mention his age, but it is expressly stated, "We sent Noah unto his folk" (XI: 25). This means that Noah's mission was confined to his people and, therefore, the flood which destroyed them did not involve the whole of mankind as has been stated by the Old Testament (Genesis, 6:11-13). According to the Old Testament, God intended to make an end of all flesh. The Qur'ān which has a clearer perception of truth says that a few righteous people were saved. On the other hand, the Old Testament says that the whole earth (meaning all who lived on earth) had been corrupted. This entails a false conception of human nature since, however much corruption may strike root in a society, there will always be some men who will escape it. That is the reason why, according to the Qur'ān, some who followed Noah were saved, while the rest were drowned in the flood (VII:64). Similarly, the Qur'ān makes no mention of the fact stated by the Old Testa-

ment that God felt sorry why He had created man (Genesis, 6:7).

The Qur'ānic account of the flood is as follows:

"And we sent Noah unto his folk (and he said): Lo! I am a plain warner unto you. That ye may serve none save. Allāh. Lo! I fear for you the retribution of a painful Day! The chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: We see thee but a mortal like us, and we see not that any follow thee save most abject among us, without reflection. We behold in you no merit above us—nay, we deem you liar" (XI:25-7).

Noah's reply to these remarks was that he relied on a clear proof from his Lord and had no desire to obtain wealth or power for himself. Noah further told them, "I am not going to thrust away those who believe. Lo! they have to meet their Lord—but I see you a folk that are ignorant. And O my people! who will deliver me from Allāh if I thrust them away?" (XI:29-30). But the leading men of his times turned a deaf ear to all his preachings and asked him to bring, if he could, the punishment with which he threatened them.

Commenting on these verses, al-Rāzī says that Noah's folk objected to his mission on three grounds. First, that he was just a mortal like others; so he could lay no claim to their obedience. Secondly, his following consisted of artisans whose social standing was not high and that if he had been a true Prophet, men of noble birth and talented persons would have accepted him. Thirdly, they thought that Noah and his followers had no superiority over them, that is, superiority in intelligence or in the ability to adjust themselves to the

ıirements of their immediate interests or even in the power 'guing effectively with their opponents. The reply given '-Rāzī with regard to the last two objections is that the :lievers were, in reality, pointing to the fact that Noah's wers had little by way of wealth and material resources, their social standing was low and that the professions :h they followed were not honourable. But this objection, al-Rāzī, is based on sheer ignorance, because in matters aith and religion, the status of an individual is not deter-ed by the rank he holds in society, nor by his family ties even by the amount of wealth which he may possess. the other hand, poverty is better suited to religion than :h. Al-Rāzī maintains that the Prophets were not sent pt for the purpose of weaning away the people from ss) worldliness. As regards their objection that they ıd no superiority or merit in Noah and his followers, āzī says that this is also the outcome of sheer ignorance, ıuse the superiority or merit of which God takes notice ne which comes from knowledge and virtue, and they d not deny this in the case of Noah and his followers, ss they had evidence to the contrary.

Ibn Kathīr's[2] comment on the above verses is that objections put forward by the disblievers against Noah his followers constitute an indication of their ignorance want of intelligence, because a truth cannot be stigmatized ejected merely on the ground that it has been accepted by ons who belong to the lower ranks of society, for truth ains truth whether it is followed by persons who come ıoble families or people who happen to belong to the :r ranks of society. Truth, adds Ibn Kathīr, is followed

by persons of noble disposition, even though they may be poor, while those who reject it do so because they are made of baser stuff. The most probable thing, he remarks, is that the followers of truth generally come from those who are weak (socially and economically,) while its opponents belong to the higher ranks of society and occupy influential positions.

Another important aspect of Noah's story mentioned by the Qur'ān has been referred to in the verse, "And Noah cried unto his Lord and said: My Lord, Lo! my son is of my household! Surely Thy promise is the Truth and Thou art the Most Just of Judges. He said: O Noah, Lo! he is not of thy household; Lo! he is of evil conduct, so ask not of Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge. I admonish thee lest thou be among the ignorant" (XI:45-6). These verses show that in a movement for the regeneration of moral and spiritual values, blood-ties, racial bonds or national affinity do not count and individuals are judged purely on the basis of the beliefs they hold and the moral conduct they display. Muslim commentators of the Qur'ān, like al-Rāzī[3] and Ibn Kat̲h̲īr,[4] while quoting some authorities which express the opinion that the words used by the Qur'ān, "He is not of thy household" establish the fact that the son for whom Noah prayed was an illegitimate son of his wife, reject the interpretation on the ground that the wife of a prophet cannot be guilty of such gross misconduct. What the verse indicates, according to al-Rāzī,[5] is that in matters of faith, the bonds of kinship are not to be trusted. The only bond that is trustworthy is one of ideological affinity. Ibn Kat̲h̲īr[6] states, on the basis of a chain of authorities going back to Ibn 'Abbās, that he was Noah's real son but he opposed his father in his mission.

We now come to the beginnings of Jewish history proper, that is, the events that led to their exodus from Egypt. But before this we should deal with the story of Joseph during whose life-time the Israelites settled in Egypt and enjoyed the protection of the Pharaoh. The Qur'ānic version of Joseph's settling in Egypt is slightly different from that of the Old Testament. According to the Qur'ān, Joseph dreamt that the sun and the moon together with eleven stars were bowing down to him. When he told this to his father, the latter advised him not to tell the dream to his brothers, for he said, they would lay some trap for him (out of jealousy). The Qur'ān does not say whether Joseph followed his father's advice, but it seems that he did so. However, the brothers of Joseph one day prevailed upon their father, in spite of the latter's remonstrances, to take Joseph with them on an outing, assuring Jacob that they would personally look after his safety. But when their father consented, they acted treacherously and pushed him down into a deserted well from where he was hauled up by a chance caravan of traders and was sold as a slave to a high officer of the Pharaoh. Joseph thus found himself the member of an Egyptian household.[7]

How Joseph, a stranger to a new land and among a foreign people, came to enjoy the trust and confidence of the Egyptian monarch and actually controlled the destinies of the Egyptian people, is an illustration of what the power of faith and the force of character, produced by it, can achieve. The story of Joseph, as narrated by the Qur'ān, brings out most clearly the spiritual and moral element at work in the shaping of history. Let us see what the Qur'ān has to say of Joseph after he had been purchased by Potiphar (the wife of the Pharaoh is not mentioned in the Qur'ān)."And

he of Egypt who purchased him said unto his wife: Receive him honourably, perhaps he may prove useful to us or we may adopt him as a son. Thus We established Joseph in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events. And Allāh was predominant in his career, but most of mankind know not. And when he reached his prime, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus We reward the good" (XII:21-2).

Muslim commentators have discussed the question whether or not Joseph was a Prophet and if he was a Prophet, when was prophethood conferred on him. Those who maintain that he was not a prophet argue from the last verse quoted above which shows that the wisdom and knowledge conferred on him were the outcome of his goodness, that is, his patience under suffering. But this opinion has been generally rejected. Some maintain that the power to interpret events mentioned in the verses quoted above means the conferment of prophethood on him, while the majority of the commentators hold that prophethood was conferred on him when he reached the prime of his life, as mentioned in the above verses. Al-Rāzī interprets wisdom as consisting essentially in the power to resist evil thoughts and desires. Wisdom, he adds, means practical wisdom, while knowledge means theoretical wisdom. Another interpretation given by him is that wisdom (*ḥukm*) means prophethood, because the Prophet is essentially a ruler of men, whether in the political or the spiritual sense, and knowledge means knowledge of religion and spiritual affairs.[8]

In any case, these verses show that Joseph, by the

integrity of his character and his intelligence in handling practical affairs, had so far gained the confidence of Potiphar that the latter entrusted his affairs to him and reposed full confidence in his loyalty. What the Qur'ān wants to impress on its readers in connection with this episode is that by the force of his moral character a man can triumph over the most adverse circumstances, which means that man is not totally at the mercy of the circumstances for he can mould these in accordance with his ideals, provided these ideals generate in him the power and self-control necessary for the successful pursuit of his moral objective. Here was Joseph, a foreigner in Egypt, in status a slave, labouring under all the disabilities incidental to these two factors and yet, by the sheer force of his character, he had already gained in the household of his master a position which many an Egyptian might have envied.

But a greater test of his moral purity was to come, one from which he emerged with a greater splendour. The wife of Potiphar, attracted by his beauty and youth, tried to seduce him. Joseph repelled all her advances and met her arts successfully. When Potiphar's wife, one day finding herself alone with Joseph, asked him to commit the evil deed, he replied, "I seek refuge in Allāh. Lo! He is my Lord, who hath treated me honourably. Wrong-doers never prosper" (XII:23).

Commenting on this verse Al-Rāzī[9] says that Joseph's statement that he sought refuge in God implies that since God has bestowed so many gifts and favours on His creatures, there is a corresponding obligation on man to observe

His commands. It is this obligation Joseph appears to have in mind which prevents him from committing the evil deed. Al Rāzī adds that the verse may be interpreted in another manner. It may also mean that the gifts and favours of God put a man under the obligation to act justly towards his fellow-men and be careful not to infringe their rights. When Joseph's master had done so much for him, it would be wickedness on his part to do the evil deed after the trust and confidence he had reposed in him.

However, leaving aside al-Rāzī's comments, Joseph's remark that the wrong-doers never prosper, furnishes a clue to the Qur'ānic concept of history. It means that wrong-doing of any kind (and here a specific kind of wrong-doing has been particularly stressed) never brings worldly prosperity. It may give a momentary and ephemeral pleasure or bring some immediate good. But what is immediately good or pleasurable is not necessarily so in the ultimate reckoning. Man should strive after some more permanent good, if he aspires for an honourable existence.

Joseph's refusal to comply with the base wishes of his master's wife was followed by an episode which has been mentioned in the Qur'ān but not in the Old Testament. However, this episode is instructive in so far as it throws light on the moral state of the high society in Egypt of that period. The Qur'ān says that when the news of the love affair of Potiphar's wife spread to the circle of her friends, these women blamed her for having fallen in love with a raw youth. Thereupon Potiphar's wife invited them to her house and provided each of them with a knife and dish containing some fruits

or other eatables. She then asked Joseph to just pass before them and when he did so, they were so much bewitched with his beauty and grace that they cut their fingers, instead of cutting the fruits in their dishes. This incident further inflamed her passions and she threatend Joseph with imprisonment, if he failed to comply with her wishes, whereupon Joseph remarked, "O my Lord! prison is more dear to me than unto which they urge me, and if Thou fend not off their wishes from me, I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish" (XII:33).

Al-Rāzī's interpretation[10] of this verse is that when Potiphar's wife threatened Joseph with imprisonment, all the women who had assembled at her residence tried to persuade him to comply with her wishes and said that it was inexpedient for him to refuse to do what she desired, because his refusal would mean imprisonment and disgrace. Thereupon Joseph said that prison was much better than that to which they called him.

The correctness of this interpretation is corroborated by the incident that followed. When it was decided to release Joseph he demanded that his innocence be established before he was released from prison. According to the Qur'ān, "He (the King) then sent for those women and said: What happened when ye asked an evil act of Joseph" (XII:51). The Qur'ān here uses the plural in the feminine gender, which shows that all those women acted as accomplices trying to persuade Joseph to comply with the wishes of Potiphar's wife.

This incident throws lurid light on the state of high Egyptian society in the days of Joseph and shows that it was passing through extreme moral decadence, for it is possible and natural in a society in which individual morality is not very high that a woman's friends would encourage her to pursue her love affairs without admonition but no woman even in such a depraved society would go so for as to persuade a man to have illicit sexual relations with a friend of hers. But here the entire high society of Egypt consents to become an accomplice in the wicked deed of Potiphar's wife and tries to persuade Joseph to start committing the gravest sin. This reflects a high degree of moral turpitude to which the the Egyptian society of the time had sunk, that is, the people who really governed the Egyptians, and it is this moral factor which explains the eventual triumph of a handful of Israelites over the hordes of Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus.

After Joseph has been thrown into the prison, he meets there some fellow prisoners, two of whom relate to him the dreams they had dreamt and request Joseph to interpret them. Joseph complies with their requests. So far the Old Testament story agrees with that of the Qur'ān's. What the Old Testament story omits is that Joseph was full of the sense of a mission and tried to persuade his fellow prisoners to abandon the worship of their gods and surrender themselves to the Almighty. Thus the Qur'ān relates that when his fellow prisoners asked him to give his interpretation of their dreams, Joseph replied, "The food which ye are given (daily) shall not come unto you but I shall tell you the interpretation ere it cometh unto you. This is of that which my

Lord hath taught me. Lo! I have forsaken the religion of the fold who believe not in Allāh and are disbelievers in the hereafter. And I have followed the religion of my father, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute aught as partner to Allāh. This is of the bounty of Allāh unto us (the seed of Abraham), but most men give not thanks. O my two fellow prisoners! Are divers lords better, or Allāh the One, the Almighty. Those of whom ye worship beside Him are but names, ye and your fathers have invented. Allāh hath revealed no sanction for them. The decision rests with Allāh only, who hath commanded that ye worship none save Him. This is the right religion, but most men know it not" (XII:37-40).

Here Joseph has been depicted by the Qur'ān as the leader of a spiritual movement. The Qur'ān leaves out all the details mentioned in the Old Testament as to how the sons of Jacob settled in the land of Goshen and acquired large possessions therein, for it is not interested in the narration of the history of the Israelites as a race. Its concern is with the spiritual creed of the patriarchs, their moral teachings and mode of life, that is, with factors which affect the life of a nation as a whole and mould its destiny. Jacob as a representative of Abraham's progeny, occupies a secondary place in the Qur'ān as compared with Joseph who is the exemplar of a particular way of life calculated to better the material and moral condition of his people.

The next important figure in Jewish history after Joseph is that of Moses. The Qur'ān has narrated the story of Moses and the relevant events in more than one chapter,

because its purpose is not to trace the evolution of Jewish history but to impress on the reader the effects of collective misbehaviour on the moral life and destiny of peoples and nations. In the very first verse of the Qur'ān on the subject, it has been made clear that the story of Moses is intended only for those who believe, that is, for those who have faith in the law of moral causation. "We narrate unto thee the story of Moses and Pharaoh with truth, for folk who believe. Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them he oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! he was of those who work corruption. And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors. And to establish them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they feared from them" (XXVIII:2-6).

The first accusation which the Qur'ān has brought against Pharaoh is that he exalted himself, which means that he regarded himself as a law unto himself and would not submit to the Divine law. What is more important is that he got himself accepted as such by his own people. From this, we may infer that the Qur'ān holds that one of the most fundamental causes of national decay is the acceptance by the people of any national leader or other authority as constituting a law unto itself, because this involves refusal to owe allegiance to the Divine law which seeks to place limitations on human authority with a view to restraining it from exercising unlimited power in any manner that it chooses. More light on this point is thrown by comments on the following verse of the Qur'ān:

"The chiefs of the Pharaoh's people said: (O king)! will thou suffer Moses and his people to make mischief in the land and flout thee and thy gods" (VII:127).

Al-Rāzī's[11] comment is that scholars have differed on the question whether Pharaoh made small idols for his people or commanded them to worship them saying, "I am the mightiest god and the god of these idols". But it is far more probable, adds al-Rāzī, that he was an atheist who denied the existence of the Maker and said that lower world is governed by the stars...... Therefore his claim that he was the mightiest god meant that he was their protector and nourisher, one who had showered his gifts and favours on them and had provided them with food and sustenance. Further, his saying that he had not made any god for them besides himself meant that it was not necessary for them to do service to anyone else except himself and if this was his creed, adds al-Rāzī, then it is probable that he had idols made in the image of stars and used to worship them according to the creed of star worshippers.

Al-Suyūṭī,[12] however, says something more appealing to reason that the gods mentioned by the Qur'ān do not mean idols. The Qur'ānic verse refers to the fact that Pharaoh's chieftains thought that Moses should not be allowed to undermine the respect and honour paid to him by his subjects.

As regards the Qur'ānic statement that "Pharaoh made its people into castes" there are two interpretations. According to Ibn Kathīr,[13] he divided the Egyptians into different professional castes and employed them for the pur-

poses of the state. Al-Zamakhsharī[14] says that this can be interpreted in two ways. First, that he created professional castes, some of which he employed in the work of constructing buildings, others in cultivating the fields and still others in digging the ground. Those whom he did not employ in this manner were levied a tax for which al-Zamakhsharī uses the term *jizyah*. Secondly that he created groups and factions and sowed the seeds of enmity among them. Two such groups were the Copts and the Israelites. This latter interpretation is far more rational, as it is historically true that the Pharaohs tried by every means to prevent a fusion of these two races or their embracing a common creed, which could only be that of the Israelites. The Pharaohs not only kept the Israelites degraded but taught the Egyptians to despise them.

The Qur'ān further states that "We desired to favour those who were oppressed (literally rendered weak and helpless) and to make them examples" (literally leaders). Al-Rāzī[15] says that it is possible that the verse may mean that, while the Pharaoh intended to keep the Israelites in a weak and helpless state, God's saying that He intended to make them leaders, this means, according to al-Rāzī, that He wanted them to hold the first place in this world as well as in the next. Mujāhid, says al-Rāzī, takes 'leaders' to mean those who invite the people to act virtuously, while Qatādah is of the opinion that 'leaders' means rulers and governors.

A broader interpretation of the verse is, however, found in the saying of 'Umar quoted by al-Suyūṭī[16] that he has appointed governors and officers, in accordance with the Qur'ānic verse. "We intend to favour those who have been kept weak and helpless". This means that it is the will of God that the weak and the helpless should be helped to

gain a dignified status in society and 'Umar appointed his governors and officers with a view to fulfilling this aspect of the Divine will. We can say more and claim that it is an oft-recurring phenomenon in history that if the weak and the helpless are not helped and their grievances not redressed, the Divine will intervenes in history and creates forces which raise the weak and helpless to the desired level. This is what actually happened in the case of the Israelites who had been rendered weak and powerless by the succeeding Pharaohs. God raised a Prophet who delivered them from utter subjection.

The fact is that all these verses of the Qur'ān are pregnant with the deepest significance for the philosophy of history. The Qur'ān states in a few words what has taken philosophers of history years and years to observe and contemplate. Briefly, the process of historical change as described by the Qur'ān consists of the following stages. Some human authority sets itself up as a law unto itself and refuses submission to the law of God as revealed through the prophets, or paying lip service to the Divine laws infringes most of them in practice. This is generally the outcome of 'irreligion' or a religion which has become corrupted at its roots. The rule of such an authority is oppressive in practice and tends to degrade certain sections of society. In this way, grave inequalities are created and human beings, instead of getting closer to each other, are divided by artificial differences. God wants His creatures to live amicably and develop a spirit of brotherhood and mutual love and respect. But the actual course of history begins to flow in the opposite direction. At this juncture, God intervenes in history by creating some force which aims at restoring the balance which has been upset by the unjust rule of an authority which is not ready

to accept any moral or religious limitations on its power. Usually a leader of great spiritual or moral force appears from among the aggrieved people, and despite the much greater economic and political power of the established authority, wins a decisive victory over his opponents by the superiority of the moral forces at his command.

The above explanation of the process of historical change is a broad generalization and should not be taken as if it were a universal law of nature which is unfailingly and rigorously operative throughout all history. Actually, other factors may intervene and the spiritual leadership thrown up by the will of God may not meet with the success it desires and deserves. The movement started by the new leader may end as a minority movement. It may even suffer total defeat or it may succeed in rousing the moral and spiritual consciousness of man without being able to effect any changes at the political and economic level. In any case, the message and work of the new spiritual leader is bound to have its repercussions on society and may possibly blossom forth, in a later age, under more favourable conditions and achieve the desired success.

Reverting to the story of Moses and Pharaoh, we find that the Qur'ān's narration of the story in different chapters is more or less identical, except for some slight differences in emphasis. But these differences are important for our purposes. Therefore, we shall proceed with the story as narrated by the Qur'ān, noting the differences as we go on.

In Sūrah VII, the Qur'ān says: "Then, after them, We sent Moses with Our tokens unto Pharaoh and his chiefs but they repelled them. Now, see the nature of the consequence of the corrupters" (VII:103). After narrating the

conversation between Moses and Pharaoh during the course of which Pharaoh demanded some clear proof of his mission and Moses threw down his staff which turned into a serpent, the Qur'ān says that the Egyptian chiefs accused Moses of being a wizard whose object was to expel the Egyptians from the land and they advised Pharaoh to assemble their own experts in magic. This was done but Moses overcame the Egyptian magicians, whereupon the latter fell down prostrate and accepted the religion of Moses.

The remaining part of the story has been narrated thus: "Pharaoh said: Ye believe in him before I give you leave. Lo! this is the plot ye have plotted in the city that ye may drive its people hence. But ye shall come to know! Surely, I shall have your hands and feet cut off upon alternate sides. Then I shall crucify everyone of you. They said: Lo! We are about to return unto our Lord. Thou takest vengeance on us only for as much as we believed the tokens of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord vouchsafe unto us steadfastness and make us die as men who have surrendered (unto Thee). The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said: (O King), wilt thou suffer Moses and his people to make mischief in the land and flout thee and thy gods? He said: We will slay their sons and spare their women, for lo! we are in power over them. And Moses said unto his people: Seek help in Allāh and endure. Lo! the earth is Allāh's. He giveth it for an inheritance to whom He willeth. And lo! the sequel is for those who keep their duty (unto Him). They said: We suffered hurt before thou camest unto us, and since thou hast come unto us. He said: It may be that your Lord is going to destroy your adversary and make you viceroys in the earth, that He may see how ye behave. And we straitened Pharaoh's folk with famine

and the dearth of fruits, that peradventure they might heed. But whenever good befell them, they said: This is ours; and whenever evil smote them, they ascribed it to the evil auspices of Moses and those with him. Surely their evil auspices was only with Allāh. But most of them knew not. And they said: Whatever portent thou bringest where-with to bewitch us, we shall not put faith in thee. So We sent them the flood and the locusts and the vermin and the frogs and the blood—a succession of clear signs. But they were arrogant and became guilty. And when the terror fell on them they cried:

> "O Moses! Pray for us unto thy Lord, because He hath a covenant with thee. If thou removest the terror from us, we verily will trust thee, and will let the children of Israel go with thee."

"But when We did remove from them the terror for a term which they must reach, behold! they broke their covenant. Therefore, We took retribution from them; and We drowned them in the sea: because they denied Our revelations and were heedless of them. And We caused the folk, who were despised, to inherit the eastern parts of the land and the western parts of it which We had blessed. And the fair word of the Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their endurance; and We annihilated (all) that Pharaoh and his folk had done and that they had contrived" (VII:123-37).

The Qur'ān has repeated the same story in Sūrah X with a slight shift of emphasis on certain points:

> "Then, after them, We sent Moses and Aaron unto Pharaoh and his chiefs with Our revelation,

> but they were arrogant and were a guilty folk. And when the Truth from Our presence came unto them, they said: This is mere magic. Moses said: Speak ye (so) of the Truth when it hath come unto you? Is this magic? Now magicians thrive not. They said: Hast thou come unto us to pervert us from that (faith) in which we found our fathers, and that you two may own a place of greatness in the land? we will not believe you two" (X:76-9).

Then after the magicians had been brought and had cast their wands Moses said: "That which ye have brought is magic. Lo! Allāh will make it vain. Lo! Allāh upholdeth not the work of mischief makers. And Allāh will vindicate the Truth by His words, however much the guilty be averse. But none trusted Moses, save some scions of his people, (and they were) in fear of Pharaoh and their chiefs, that they would persecute them. Lo! Pharaoh was verily a tyrant in the land, and lo! he verily was of the wanton. And Moses said: O my people! If ye have believed in Allāh then put trust in Him, if ye have indeed surrendered (unto Him)! And Moses said: Our Lord! Lo! Thou hast given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and riches in the life of the world, Our Lord: that they may lead men astray from Thy way. Our Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not till they see the painful doom" (X:82-5, 89).

The above two versions of the story bring some new facts to light. First, that in their estimate of Moses, Pharaoh and his chiefs were thinking purely in material terms. For example, their remark that Moses was a wizard who had come with the intention of expelling them from their country

amounted to a plain misreading of the nature of the mission with which Moses had been charged. If we set this against the remark made by Moses that the earth is Allāh's, He giveth it for an inheritance whom He will, we can note the difference in the outlook of the two. The Pharaoh thought like a modern nationalist that the rulership of the country should belong, as a matter of right, to the people of the country. Moses, on the other hand, thought that rulership and sovereignty are the gifts of God with which He favours any group of people who deserve them by viture of their moral superiority.

A more or less similar attitude on the part of the Pharaoh is reflected from the verse of the Qur'ān which says, "They said: Hast thou come unto us to pervert us from that (faith) in which we found our fathers, and that you two may own the place of greatness in the land? We will not believe you two" (X:79).

Here again, it seems clear that the Pharaoh and his chiefs were thinking in terms of struggle for political powers, as if Moses had come to wrest power from them and not to bring them round to the path of godliness and virtue. Moreover, the verse also brings to light the fact that they were so strongly attached to their traditions, and the habits and usages of their forefathers, that they could accept nothing, however rational and satisfying to human soul, that might go against the beliefs and traditions handed down to them by their ancestors. These two factors, namely, attachment to one's worldly interests and clinging to the past, even if that past is full of things evil, constitute the greatest impediment to the moral progress of a nation and the preservation of its material and spiritual forces.

In this connection, the Qur'ān makes another very

portant remark and it is this: "But when Our tokens came to them, plain to see, they said: This is mere magic. And y denied them, though their souls acknowledged them, spite and arrogance. Then see the nature of the conse- ences for the wrong-doers!" (XXVII:13-14). This verse ngs out the important fact that the desire for worldly glory of maintaining one's ascendancy over one's fellowmen y so take possession of man's soul that he may reject the inest truth, even when that truth is clear to his understand- ;, so that it is not always lack of intelligence or inability understand that stands in the way of man's acceptance of th. On the other hand, it is the customs, traditions and ges within which man grows up, i.e., the entire social lieu in which he moves and which develops in him certain bits of thought and attitudes of thinking that make him d to truth even though in his innermost being he ac- owledges it. In other words, man's inherently rational l truth-loving nature is overlaid by his habits and customs. re Pharaoh and his chiefs inwardly acknowledged the ssage of Moses but because they had become used to being ated as men of distinction with all its fanfares they could bear the thought of descendning to the level of commonalty l of being treated as men among men.

Secondly, although the mission of Moses and Aaron s primarily addressed to the Israelites, it was not exclu- ely meant[17] for them, since the Qur'ān says that very people among the Egyptians believed in Moses; the rest the people did not believe in him out of the fear of the araoh. Therefore, it is clear that a few of the non-Israelites re also among those who followed Moses. This is further ved by the fact that the Egyptian sorcerers were converted the creed of Moses after they suffered defeat and gave up

worshipping the gods of Egypt. The fact is that, according to the Qur'ān, the mission of Moses was also personally addressed to Pharaoh and the latter was not excluded from the blessings of God if he gave up his disbelief, for the Qur'ān says that God addressed Moses and Aaron saying, "Go, both of you, unto Pharaoh. Lo! he hath transgressed (the bounds). And speak unto him a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear" (XX:43-4). So, the Qur'ān does not exclude the possibility of Pharaoh's conversion to the creed of Moses, although factually he never accepted him.

The rest of the story of Moses and Pharaoh has been told by the Qur'ān in the following words:

> "And Moses said: O my people! If ye have believed in Allāh then put trust in Him, if ye have indeed surrendered (unto Him)! They said: In Allāh we put trust. Our Lord! Oh, make us not a lure for the wrong-doing folk; and, of Thy mercy, save us from the folk that disbelieve. And We inspired Moses and his brother, (saying): Appoint houses[18] for your people in Egypt and make your houses oratories, and establish worship. And give good news to the believers. And Moses said: Our Lord! Lo! Thou hast given Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and riches in the life of the world, Our Lord! that they may lead men astray from Thy way. Our Lord! Destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they believe not till they see the painful doom. He said: Your prayer is heard. Do ye twain keep to the straight path, and follow not the road of those who have no knowledge. And We brought the Chil-

> dren of Israel across the sea, and Pharaoh with his hosts pursued them in rebellion and transgression, till, when the (fate of) drowning overtook him, he exclaimed: I believe that there is no God save Him in Whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am of those who surrender (unto Him). What! Now! When hitherto thou hast rebelled and been of the wrong-doers? But this day We save thee in thy body that thou mayest be a portent for those after thee. Lo! most of mankind are heedless of our portents" (X:85-93).

The Qur'ānic narration of this part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh is designed to show that it is not the material resources of a nation, its wealth and prosperity that really decide the issue of its conflict with the forces opposed to it, but its faith and the qualities of character that are its product. Contrary to the general belief that wealth is a potent factor in the success of nations, the Qur'ān says that the Pharaoh's heart had been hardened and his spiritual and political vision blurred by the worldly splendour which surrounded him and his chiefs. Moses' statement that God had given Pharaoh all the riches and glories of life in order to lead him and his people astray does not mean that God willed to mislead Pharaoh and his chiefs. It really amounts to saying that it is in the very nature of worldly wealth and splendour to becloud men's vision and prevent them from perceiving the higher values of life. That hardening of the heart of which the Qur'ān speaks in the above verses occurs when human beings develop such an inordinate love of life and its glories and become so oblivious of their accountability to God that they are not afraid of committing any injustice and perpetrating any act of cruelty that might be considered

necessary for the preservation of their riches and worldly position.

In any case, the statement of Moses that God had given the riches and splendour of life to the Pharaoh in order that he might go astray does not prove that God willed that he should be misled, for the Qur'ān says very clearly to Moses: "Speak unto him (i.e. Pharaoh) a gentle word, that peradventure he may heed or fear" (XX:44). And "We straitened Pharaoh's folk with famine and the dearth of fruits, that peradventure they might heed" (VII:130).

This is also the view of some our commentators as pointed out by al-Rāzī[19] who himself sticks to the opposite view that Moses prayed to God that He might harden Pharaoh's heart so that he might never believe, and that this proves that God is able to do with His creatures whatsoever He likes.

It is also possible that Moses referred to the riches and splendour of Pharaoh and their effects on him, after he had grown despondent of rescuing him from evil and disbelief, in which case his statement does not contradict the Divine command that Moses and Aaron should go and preach to the Pharaoh.

After their exodus from Egypt, the Jews refused to obey the commands of Moses when he ordered them to fight the inhabitants of Palestine. The Qur'ān narrates the incident in the following verses:

> "And (remember) when Moses said unto his people: O my people! Remember Allāh's favour unto you, how He placed among you Prophets, and He made you kings,[20] and gave you that (which)

> He gave not to any (other) of (His) creatures. O my people! Go into the holy land which Allāh hath ordained for you. Turn not in fight, for surely ye turn back as losers: They said O Moses! Lo! a giant people (dwell) therein. and lo! we go not until they go forth from thence. When they go forth, then we will enter (not till then). Then outspake two of those who feared (their Lord, men) unto whom Allāh had been gracious: Enter in upon them by the gate, for if ye enter by it. lo! ye will be victorious. So put your trust (in Allāh) if ye are indeed believers. They said: O Moses! We will never enter (the land) while they are in it. So go thou and thy Lord and fight! We will sit here. He said: "My Lord! I have control of none but myself and my brother, so distinguish between us and the wrongdoing folk. (Their Lord) said: For this the land will surely be forbidden them for forty years that they will wander in the earth bewildered" (V:20-6).

These verses show that the Israelites, at the time when they came forth from Egypt, were not a disciplined people. They constantly disobeyed their Prophet and leader, Moses. A reply such as the one they gave to Moses, namely, that he and his God should fight, while they would sit and watch, reveals certain grave defects in their national character. Apart from the fact that it shows lack of respect for the leader who freed them from the bondage of Egypt, it is an indication of their ingratitude which is a very serious matter in so far as national existence is concerned, because it means that any amount of service rendered for the good of a people cannot create in their hearts the necessary attachment to the personality of their leader or leaders and, where such attach-

ment does not exist it becomes very difficult to prepare the people for any emergency that may overtake them. From the religious point of view, the conduct of the Israelites shows their lack of faith in the ideals and doctrines preached to them by Moses. The Israelites feared defeat from the Amalekites because of the latter's physical superiority. But they forgot that physical and material superiority can be overcome by discipline, fearlessness and self-sacrifice, qualities which are generated by faith in God and in the righteousness of the cause for which a people fight. In point of the quality of their leadership, the superiority of their religious doctrines and moral qualities, the Israelites were more than a match for the Amalekites who may have been physically strong but totally lacked the moral fibre of the Israelites. All these things were ignored by the Israelite chiefs, except the two who had the requisite moral perception and called the people to battle against the Amalekites putting their trust in God.

We now come to that period of Jewish history which deals with the events that followed their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The Qur'ān makes many comments on the behaviour of the Israelites during this period, for example, their relapse into idolatory, their persistent disobedience of the Divine commands and their repeated refusal to follow the directions of the Prophet Moses. "O Children of Israel! Remember My favours where with I favoured you and how I preferred you to (all) creatures.... And (remember) when We did deliver you from Pharaoh's folk, who were afflicting you with dreadful torments, slaying your sons and sparing your women: That was a tremendous trial from your Lord. And when We brought you through the sea and rescued you, and drowned the folk of Pharaoh in your sight. And when We did appoint for Moses forty

nights[21] (of solitude), and then ye chose the calf,[22] when he had gone from you, and were wrongdoers....And when We gave unto Moses the Scripture and the Criterion (of right and wrong), that ye might be led aright. And when Moses said unto his people: O my people! Ye have wronged yourselves by your choosing of the calf (for worship), So turn in penitence to your Creator, and kill (the guilty)[23] yourselves. That will be best for you with your Creator and He will relent towards you. Lo! He is the Relenting, the Merciful" (II: 47-54).

In regard to the statement made by the Qur'ān that God preferred the Israelites over all other creatures, it should be remembered that the preference given them was not absolute. In some respects they received preference over others. For example, they were blessed with a succession of spiritual leaders and some of their prophets brought revealed books with them. No other nation at that time enjoyed this distinction. But there were contemporary nations who enjoyed greater military strength and whose writ ran over a much larger area. So the preference given to the Israelites was relative. This is also the opinion of al-Rāzī.[24] Again, the superiority of the Israelites was limited to their particular age. This is the view both of Ibn Kat͟hīr and al-Suyūṭī.[25] Ibn Kat͟hīr[26] further says that the preference which God gave them was over the world of their own times, for every period of history, he remarks, has a world of its own.

However, considering the passage as a whole, it may be claimed that the passage serves to bring into light certain defects in the character of the Jews which afterwards brought them to grief. In the first place, it shows that their faith in Moses, their leader and Prophet, who had rescued

them from the clutches of the Pharaoh, was not as strong as it should have been, in spite of the fact that Moses had given so many proofs of his extraordinary spiritual powers and had been their deliverer. That they felt some attachment to the person of Moses is undeniable. But this seems to have been very superficial. After Moses had departed to the mountain of Sinai, and his return was delayed, they reverted to their old ways of thought and forgot all about his teachings. Therefore, their attachment to Moses and to the principles of their faith was not very deep. The Qur'ān points to this weakness of the Jewish character which is a source of danger for the continuance and success of any movement, religious or otherwise, for unless a people are deeply grounded in the principles of their faith and firmly attached to those who are the exemplars of that faith, there is every probability that they may fall apart for lack of discipline and their faith might lose its vitality and expensive force. Moses had to punish those Jews who had been guilty of worshipping the calf and in the circumstances of the day, the only punishment that could be effective was to have them all killed, for had they been spared their lives, the virus might have spread to the rest of the Israelites.

We would now deal with the further comments made by the Qur'ān on the behaviour of the Israelites. The Qur'ān keeps reminding the Jews of the favours of God bestowed upon them. "And when ye said: O Moses! We will not believe in thee till we see Allāh plainly; and even while ye gazed the lightning seized you. Then We revived you after your extinction, that ye might give thanks. And We caused the white cloud to overshadow you and sent down on you the manna and the quails, (saying): Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you—We wronged them not, but

they did wrong themselves. And when We said: 'Go into this township and eat freely of that which is therein, and enter the gate prostrate, and say: "Repentence". We will forgive you your sins and will increase (reward) for the right-doers. But those who did wrong changed the words which had been told them for another saying, and We sent down upon the evil-doers wrath from Heaven for their evildoing. And when Moses asked for water for his people, We said: Smite with thy staff the rock. And there gushed out therefrom twelve springs (so that) each tribe knew their drinking-place. Eat and drink of that which Allāh hath provided, and do not act corruptly, making mischief in the earth. And when ye said: O Moses! We are weary of one kind of food: so call upon the Lord for us that He bring forth for us of that which the earth groweth—of its herbs and its cucumbers and its corns and its lentils and its onions. He said: Would ye exchange that which is higher for that which is lower? Go down to settled country, thus ye shall get that which ye demand. And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from Allāh" (II:55-61).

The opinions of the commentators differ in regard to the township which the Israelites ever asked to enter. Some think that it refers to Jerusalem. Others are of the opinion that it refers to Arīḥā. However, Ibn Kat̲h̲īr[28] does not accept this explanation. Even more improbable, he says, is the opinion of those who think that the township refers to Egypt, as stated by al-Rāzī.

In regard to the command of God that the Israelites should recite the word '*Ḥiṭṭah*' (rendered as prostrate in the verses quoted above), the commentators are generally agreed that this word is derived from another Arabic word which

means to let fall or cause to fall. The meaning is that the Israelites were asked to pray to God that their sins might fall away from them, i.e., they might be forgiven for their omissions and commissions. But they changed this word into '*Ḥinṭah*' which means wheat, so that when they entered the door, they were praying for a plentiful supply of wheat and bread, instead of asking for the forgiveness of their sins.

All these verses are further reminders to the Israelites of the favours which God bestowed upon them and of the fact that their behaviour was not indicative of the gratitude that they ought to have felt for the favours conferred on them. They not only lacked discipline and disobeyed the commands of their Prophet and leader, as for instance, when they were ordered to enter a town in a state of submission to God and prayerfulness but they made their entry asking for wheat and bread. What is more revealing in these verses is that, in spite of all their sufferings and tribulations and the constant instructions and teachings of Moses, the Jews did not really imbibe the moral and spiritual outlook inculcated by the Prophet. Their view of life remained grossly materialistic. Again and again they pestered Moses with demands which showed dissatisaction with the existing state of affairs and the desire to revert to their former state from which Moses had delivered them.

The Qur'ān continues to remind the Jews of the Divine favours of which they had been recipients and of His mercy to them. It asks them to recollect how they misbehaved in the past and violated the commands of their religion. "And (remember, O children of Israel) when We made a covenant[29] with you and caused the Mount to tower above you, (saying): Hold fast that which We have given you, and remember that which is therein, that ye may ward off (evil). Then even

after that, ye turned away, and if it had not been for the grace of Allāh and His mercy ye had been among the losers. And ye know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how We said unto them: Be ye apes,[30] despised and hated! And We made it an example to their own and to succeeding generations, and an admonition to the Godfearing. And when Moses said unto his people: Lo! Allāh commandeth you that ye sacrifice a cow, they said: Dost thou make game of us? He answered: Allāh forbid that I should be among the foolish. They said: Pray for us unto thy Lord that He make clear to us what (cow) she is. (Moses) answered: Lo! He saith, Verily she is a cow neither with calf nor immature; (she is) between the two conditions; so do that which ye are commanded. They said: Pray for us unto thy Lord that He make clear to us of what colour she is. (Moses) answered: Lo! He saith: Verily she is a yellow cow. Bright is her colour, gladdening beholders. They said: Pray for us unto thy Lord that He make clear to us what (cow) she is. Lo! cows are much alike to us; and lo! if Allāh wills, we may be led aright. (Moses) answered: Lo! He saith: Verily she is a cow unyoked: She plougheth not the soil nor watereth the tilth; whole and without mark. They said: Now thou bringest the truth. So they sacrificed her, though almost they did not" (II:63-71).

The above verses throw good light on the chracteristics of the Israelites. First, they were not careful in the observance of the Divine commands which they violated very often. An instance has been given by the Qur'ān of their breach of Sabbath laws. As explained by the commentators, they were ordered not to catch fish on the Sabbath day. But they tried to circumvent this order by means of a trick which consisted in turning the fish to the coastal parts on the eve-

ning of the Sabbath day and then catching them on the morning of the next day. There was, therefore, no apparent breach of the law involved. But in reality it amounted to a flagrant violation of the command. The Israelites who were guilty of this act were practising a kind of self-deception, which is dangerous for the moral life of any community. To circumvent God's commands by means of such tricks as the one resorted to by the Jews betrays total lack of faith in God and in His omniscience. A people who really believe that God is All-seeing and that He can very well plumb the depths of the human heart can never be guilty of circumventing His commands through such devices. What these Israelites forgot is that God requires from us a sincere effort to obey Him and not merely to make a show of obedience, while the real intention is to avoid, as far as possible, the burden of obeying His laws. The psychological and spiritual make-up of a people who make a show of obedience, while, in truth, they are guilty of disobedience renders them insincere, dishonest and hypocritical. The story of the cow which the Israelites were asked to sacrifice further illustrates the fact that they did not take their religion seriously and sought every conceivable pretext to ignore in practice the commands given by their prophet-leader, Moses. Here we see that Moses repeatedly clarified as to what cow was to be sacrificed yet the Israelites were not satisfied and obeyed him in the end with the greatest reluctance.

The next phase of Jewish history with which the Qur'ān deals is the one which saw the beginning of the monarchy. The Qur'ān, as usual, does not go into details but gives a brief sketch of the causes that impelled the Jewish tribes to think of having a king over them. "Bethink thee of the leaders of the Children of Israel after Moses, how they said unto a

Prophet whom they had: Set up for us a King and we will fight in Allāh's way. He said: Would ye then refrain from fighting if fighting were prescribed for you? They said: Why should we not fight in Allāh's way when we have been driven from our dwellings with our children? Yet, when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, all save a few of them. Allāh is aware of evil-doers. Their prophet said unto them: Lo! Allāh hath raised up Saul to be a king for you. They said: How can he have kingdom over us when we are more deserving of the kingdom than he is, since he hath not been given wealth enough? He said: Lo! Allāh hath chosen him above you, and hath increased him abundantly in wisdom and stature. Allāh bestoweth His sovereignty on whom He will. Allāh is All-embracing, All-knowing" (II: 246-47).

The main object of the Qur'ān in describing the situation that led to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy is to impress upon its readers the fact that rulership and kingdom need some moral qualification, and that in conferring them on human individuals, race or family, blood or kinship and wealth or worldly prosperity are not given much weight by the real Sovereign of the Universe. On the other hand, the Qur'ān stresses the qualities of physical strength and knowledge of men and affairs as being necessary for a person who aspires to become a ruler. Although the Qur'ān uses the word 'stature' which has been explained by many commentators consisting in physical strength, the underlying conception seems to be that of control over one's bodily passions, the natural outcome of which is greater bodily strength. In any case, the Qur'ān deprecates the materialistic attitude of the Israelites who thought that Saul was not qualified for rulership because he was a poor man and exhorts them to

give greater weight to the spiritual elements in man's nature as a qualification for the tasks that entail social responsibility. Ibn Kathīr concludes from this verse that a ruler should be a man of knowledge and good features as well as of considerable physical strength and self-control.[31]

The Qur'ān now proceeds to tell the rest of the story about Saul and his victory over Goliath in the following verses:

> "And when Saul set out with the army, he said: Lo! Allāh will try you by (the ordeal of) a river.[32] Whosoever therefore drinketh thereof he is not of me, and whosoever tasteth it not he is of me, save him who taketh (thereof) in the hollow of his hand. But they drank thereof, all save a few of them. And after he had crossed (the river), he and those who believed with him, they said: We have no power this day against Goliath and his hosts. But those who knew that they would meet their Lord exclaimed: How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allāh's leave: Allāh is with the steadfast. And[33] when they went into the field against Goliath and his hosts they said: Our Lord! Bestow on us endurance, make our foothold sure and give us help against the disbelieving folk. So they routed them by Allāh's leave and David slew Goliath; and Allāh gave him the kingdom and wisdom, and taught him of that which He willeth. And if Allāh had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted.[34] But Allāh is a Lord of Kindness to (His) creatures" (II:249-51).

The above verses of the Qur'ān contain some very significant hints as to the viewpoint of the Qur'ān in respect

of the factors which govern the life of social groups in their mutual conflicts. First, they point to the fact of conflict itself, namely ,that there is no such thing as universal and lasting peace and that wars, disturbances and conflicts are inevitable in the process of history. The Qur'ān seems to say, in fact, that it is only through the conflicts of groups that corruption and disorders are removed and peace is established. This does not mean that all conflicts and wars are necessary or just, but that some are. It depends on the issues involved in the conflicts. Secondly, when an actual conflict takes place, the faith and morale of the fighters are far more important than merely physical and material factors. The majority of the Israelites in Saul's army got disheartened when they looked at the numerical superiority of the enemy. But those who really believed in God and had deeper conviction of the existence of an hereafter knew better. They were not overawed by the physical might of the enemy and told their fellow Israelites that with faith and steadfastness the enemy could be defeated, for God is with the believing and the steadfast, and that there are unaccountable factors in a war which can tip the scales: for the ultimate decision lies with God Who is the Power of all powers and without Whose help no amount of material strength can avail. Thus Qur'ān seems to emphasize here the religious and moral the elements and in the conflicts which take place between groups and nations.

The Qur'ān also deprecates reliance on numerical strength. It is quality, not quantity that counts in a conflict. Again, the quality to which the Qur'ān gives greatest preeminence is the quality of steadfastness. But steadfastness can come only from an unshakable faith in the righteousness of the cause for which a particular group may be struggling.

Only those can remain firm and believing in the face of overwhelming difficulties who have an ideal to struggle and fight for and whose faith in the righteousness of that ideal remains unbreakable. A mercenary group or army fighting merely for immediate gain can be easily defeated by a much smaller and weaker group, provided the latter is inspired by an ideal in whose righteousness it has a firm conviction.

We now come to the period of monarchy which saw the rise of David followed by the splendour and riches of Solomon. The Qur'ān, speaking about the war between Saul and Goliath, mentions David and says: "So they routed them by Allāh's leave and David slew Goliath; and Allāh gave him the kingdom and wisdom,[35] and taught him of that which He willeth" (II: 251). According to most Muslim commentators, wisdom here refers to prophethood, since David was the Prophet (after Samuel) and King (after Saul). Thus were combined political power and prophethood in one person for the first time in the history of Israel.

The Qur'ān generally mentions David together with Solomon, because of the proximity of their two reigns. For example, in the Sūrah on the Prophets, the Qur'ān says: "And David and Solomon, when they gave judgment concerning the field,[36] when people's sheep had strayed and browsed therein by night; and we were witnesses to their judgment. And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and unto each of them We gave judgment and knowledge. And We subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof). And We taught him the art of making garments (of mail) to protect you in your daring. Are ye then thankful? And unto Solomon (We subdued) the wind in its raging.[37] It set by His command

toward the land which We had blessed. And of everything We are aware. And of the evil[38] ones (subdued We unto him) some who dived (for pearls) for him and did other work, and We were warders unto them" (XXI:78-82).

Here again, the Qur'ān lays stress on two moral qualities which should be considered necessary for a person who is to be appointed as ruler. These are judgment and knowledge. It is true, as our commentators have explained, that the judgment of a wise man need not always be correct, for to err is human but a few errors of judgment do not and cannot undo the wisdom of a wise man. Again, judgment itself is a quality which depends for its proper exercise on knowledge. The two qualities, are, in fact, inter-dependent, for knowledge itself involves exercise of judgment. However, knowledge is impossible without information. Therefore a man of knowledge is not only a man of judgment but also one who is well informed. In any case, the course of history is influenced far more by men of knowledge and judgment the perfection of which is reached in the Prophets. In emphasizing the qualities of judgment and knowledge in David and Solomon, the Qur'ān is referring not merely to their prophethood but also to the fact that the course of events is influenced far more by men of knowledge and judgment than by others. It is not machines and technology which run the wheels of a civilization but the ideas and beliefs which mould the conduct of man. The machines and the technology at the disposal of a nation or community are ultimately the product of its beliefs and life attitudes.

The Qur'ān mentions Solomon again in connection

with the two-angel, who taught magic to the people of Babylon. "And follow that which the devils falsely related against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon disbelieved not; but the devils disbelieved, teaching mankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels[39] in Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt. Nor did they (the two angels) teach it to anyone till they had said: We are only a temptation, therefore disbelieve not (in the guidance of Allāh). And from these two (angels) people learn that by which they cause division between man and wife; but they injure thereby no one save by Allāh's leave. And they learn that which harmeth them not. And surely they do know that he who trafficketh therein will have no (happy) portion in the Hereafter; and surely evil is the price for which they sell their souls, if they but knew" (II:102).

In these verses the Qur'ān refers to some very important facts. Firstly it seems that the Jews used some books the authorship of which they ascribed to Solomon. But these books contained, according to the Qur ān, much else besides the knowledge which had been vouchsafed to Solomon, because some evil-minded persons had got possession of these books and had mixed in their contents, much magical lore. So, really these books contained much falsehood for which Solomon was not responsible, and yet many Jews followed them and practised their teachings. Now since the practice of magic constitutes disbelief, pure and simple, those who were responsible for the authorship of these books in their corrupt form were the real disbelievers and not Solomon. The Qur'ān upholds the dignity and position of Solomon, as a true Prophet of God, while according to the Old Testament. Solomon was guilty of such a heinous crime as idol worship.[40]

The Qur'ān thus exonerates Solomon of all the false charges brought against him by the Jews, namely, that he worshipped idols, that he did not keep the commands of God and that he was an expert in magic by means of which he obtained his kingdom. The Qur'ān also refers in these verses to such practices which were in vogue among the Jews, probably due to their association with the Babylonians and condemns these practices as amounting to disbelief. Apart from the moral injury involved in the misuse of magic, the latter breeds superstitions of the worst kind. It is in fact the enemy of all real knowledge and scientific progress. By discrediting all such pseudo-sciences and turning the attention of man towards the law and order at the base of physical nature, the Qur'ān released human energy for the conquest of the physical world.

SECTION B

GENERAL COMMENTS OF THE QUR'ĀN ON THE LIVES OF THE JEWS

To understand the attitude of the Qur'ān in respect of the Jews, it is necessary to remember that, before the advent of Muḥammad, the Jews expected that a prophet would appear who would give them victory over their adversaries. It is said that in their wars against their enemies, they reminded the atter of the above fact and stressed that their own reveises were of a temporary character because the day was approaching when the Prophet whom they expected would help them to victory. But when the Prophet did appear at last on whom they had pinned their hopes, they rejected him outright and joined hands with the idolaters who were trying to crush

him. This is referred to by the Qur'ān in the following verse:

> "And when there cameth unto them a Scripture from Allāh, confirming that in their possession — though before that they were asking for a signal tirumph over those who disbelieved — and when there cameth unto them that which they know (to be the the Truth) they disbelieved therein. The curse of Allāh is on disbelievers" (II : 89).

According to Muḥammad 'Alī (of Lahore),[1] the Prophet whom the Jews expected to appear was the one spoken of in Deut., 18 : 15-19. "As to the fact," he adds, 'that the Jews were still expecting the promised prophet' see John I : 25. 'Why baptizest thou, then, if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet;' *that prophet*, as in John 1: 23, referring to the promised prophet of Deut., 18: 15 and 18. This shows clearly that they waited for three different prophets. Acts 3 : 21-23 also show that the prophet spoken of in Deut., 18 : 18 was still awaited after the death of Christ".

Al-Rāzī[2] says that the Jews used to ask the Arabs as to the place where the expected Prophet was to be born. Further, they described him by his qualities and were on the look-out for him. Al-Rāzī also states that the verses refer to the hope entertained by Banū Qurayẓah and Banū Naḍir of gaining victory over the Aws and the Khazraj through the expected Prophet. Another opinion, he adds, is that the verse refers to the Jewish scholars and doctors of law who found the Prophet of Islam mentioned in their Books and asked the pagan Arabs whether a person with such and such qualities had been born among them. As regards the reasons why the

Jew rejected the Prophet of Islam, al-Râzî puts forward three views. First, it is possible that the belief of the Jews was that the expected Prophet would not arise from the family of Ishmael. Therefore, they rejected him. Secondly, it may be that his acceptance would have adversely affected their position. Thirdly, it is possible they might have held the opinion that the Prophet of Islam was charged with an exclusive mission for the Arabs only

It is against this background and the Jewish idea of a chosen race with its attendant feeling of self-pride that we should study the general remarks of the Qur'ân on the beliefs and moral habits of the Jews.

As far as the religious beliefs of the Jews are concerned, the first significant remark made by the Qur'ân relates to their idea that outside Judaism there was no salvation. "And they say : Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say (unto them, O Muḥammad!) Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright,[3] and he was not of the idolaters" (II : 135). The same claim has been stated more clearly by the Qur'ân in the verse, "And they say : None shall enter the Garden except he who is a Jew, or the Christians. These are their vain desires. Say : Bring your proof if you are truthful. Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to Allâh and he is the doer of good (to others), he has his reward from his Lord and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve" (II : 111-12.) Here the Qur'ân is attacking the Jews and the Christians for their religious exclusiveness and for the mistaken notion that to attain salvation what is necessary is merely to attach oneself to a faith and that moral goodness is of no account in the matter. Jewish and Christian exclusiveness is countered here by an appeal to the faith

of Abraham who was the common ancestor of both the Jews and the Christians and who did not share many of their religious beliefs, but was a Godfearing man of upright conduct. It might not be out of place to mention here that the Jews had developed, in the course of time, anthropomorphic notions about God which were foreign to the creed of Abraham. Similar y, the Christians believed in Trinity which was an altogether new doctirne. By the time Islam appeared, Abrahamic monotheism had almost ceased to exist, except among a few scattered individuals.

Another claim put forward by the Jews was that they would not be punished for their sins in the hereafter. If they receive any punishment, it would be so slight as to be of very small consequence 'And they say : Fire will not touch us but for a few days. Say : Have you received a promise from Allāh ? Then Allāh will not fail to perform His promise. Or do you speak against Allāh what you know not?" (II : 80).

In explanation of this verse[4] al-Suyūṭī quotes a tradition in which it is stated that the Jews assembled on a certain day and disputed with the Prophet saying that fire shall not touch them except for a few days and they specified forty days.

This shows that the Jews suffered from moral complacency and religious pride which virtually destoryed their moral fibre. Since religion consists, apart from other things, in the belief that every moral act has its corresponding effect and nothing can save us from the punishment consequent on our misdeeds, except sincere repentance and self-correction, any weakening of this belief leads to moral deterioration in society. This was what actually happened in the Jewish

society of the day as a result of their belief that they would receive no punishment for the evil acts committed by them or, if they did receive any punishment, it would not be severe. The reply of theQur'ān is that man cannot escape the consequences of his deeds, good and evil; and reward or punishment is always proportionate to the nature of one's acts and one's conduct as a whole.

That the Jews regarded salvation as exclusively reserved for their own people is mentioned by the Qur'ān in the following verses which also condemn the Jews for their inordinate love of life :

> "Say : If the abode of the Hereafter with Allāh is specially for you to the exclusion of other people, then invoke, death if you are truthful. And they will never invoke it on account of what their hands have sent on before, and Allāh knows the wrong-doers. And thou wilt certainly find them the greediest of men for life, (greedier) even than those who set up gods (with God). One of them loves to be granted a life of thousand years, and his being granted a long life will in no way remove him further off from the chastisement. And Allāh is Seer of what they do" (II: 94-6).

It seems that the Jews believed that because they were ethnically, historically and religiously connected with Prophets like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this very connection would enable them to escape the wrath and punishment of God. It was of this reason that they assumed an attitude of superiority in relation to the Arabs and considered themselves to have been endowed with a special greatness. Some of the Arabs were overawed by the superiority which they thought

belonged to the Jews and the message of Islam was rendered suspect in their eyes.[5]

Here the Qur'ān says to the Jews that if they really thought that the Abode of Bliss in the hereafter belonged to them as of right, then they should prefer death over life,[6] because the bliss of the hereafter would far outweigh any physical pain that they might feel from the pangs of death. But in actual fact they cling to life far more than any other people. This is because a fear lurks in the subconscious of their mind that since they have not observed the moral standards set by their religion and their conduct has been, on the whole, reprehensible both from the religious and the moral viewpoint, they would not be able to escape the punishment of God. Therefore, they are attached to life and its pleasures and are afraid of death. This belies their tall claim that the bliss of the hereafter is exclusively reserved for the members of their own Community.

We now take up the comments of the Qur'ān on the moral character of the Jewish people and their deviation from the ethical standards laid down for them. A major charge of the Qur'ān against the Jews is that they have always been prone to follow their own whims and desires rather than accept the discipline divinely prescribed for them. As a result of this, they conducted themselves arrogantly in relation to the messages revealed to their Prophets and the Divine commands conveyed to them through these Prophets. Therefore, the Qur'ān says, while reminding them of the Divine favours vouchsafed to them, "And We indeed gave Moses the Book and we sent messengers after him one after another, and We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear arguments and streng-

thened him with the Holy Spirit. Is it then that wheneven there came to you a messenger with what your souls desired not, you were arrogant? And some you gave the lie to and others you would slay" (II : 87).

Here the Qur'ān says clearly that the Jews were very reluctant to accept the revelations brought to them by their Prophets, because they ran counter to their desires. Therefore, they either refused to accept as true what was revealed to their Prophets or killed them, if they could lay their hands on them. Muslim commentators disagree as to whether the Prophets spoken of by the Qur'ān brought a fresh code of law every time. Al-Rāzī[7] maintains that till the advent of Jesus whom the Qur'ān has mentioned specifically as the most outstanding Prophet after Moses, the Prophets followed and enforced the same code of law which had been revealed to Moses and that their mission was not to change and renew the Mosaic law but to enforce its observance. Only Jesus among the Jewish prophets was charged with the mission of giving his people a new code of law from which much of what is called the Mosaic law had been expunged.

Al-Rāzī also says that their habit of killing the Prophets might refer either to their own previous history or to the attitude they adopted towards the Prophet of Islam, for they desired to kill him. Al-Rāzī further mentions the fact that the Prophet of Islam told the people around him some time before his death that the effect of the poison with which his food had been impregnated by his Jewish hostess after the victory of Khaybar had not been completely neutralized.

A similar charge preferred by the Qur'ān against

the Jews is that they believed in a part of their Book but disbelieved in other parts (cf. Qur'ān, II : 85). This comment has been made by the Qur'ān in connection with their practice of expelling from their homes a part of their co-religionists by using physical force. But if the expelled Jews fell into their hands as captives, they would ransom them off, a practice which they had been commanded to observe so that they followed this part of the commandaments but did not observe others asking them not to expel any of their co-religionists by using physical force. In consequence they followed the law when it suited their desires or interests or was convenient to them. But any law which they felt to be inconvenient or which ran counter to their desires and interests, they completely disregarded. This attitude betrays a deepseated spiritual malady among any people in whom it strikes root, for it shows that they are not amenable to discipline and would break any law that causes them inconvenience. But those who always seek their convenience and are afraid of the hardships involved in obeying the laws of society, state or religion end by becoming a weak-kneed people prone to succumb to any power which may come into conflict with them.

The attitude of the Qur'ān in respect of the Jews becomes very clear in the following verses which also contain significant remarks about their religious and ethical conduct:

> "O Children of Israel, call to mind My favour which I bestowed on you and be faithful to (your) convenant[8] with Me, I shall fulfil (My) covenant with you ; and Me, Me alone, you should fear. And believe in that which I have revealed, verifying that which is with you, and be not the first to deny it ;

> neither take a mean price for My message ; and keep your duty to Me, Me alone. And mix not up truth with falsehood, nor hide the truth which you know. And keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and bow down with those who bow down. Do you enjoin on men to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book? Have you then no sense?" (II : 40-4).

Here the Qur'ān mentions three aspects of the Jewish character. First, they threw away the truth that was with them for a very low price ; secondly, they were in the habit of mixing truth with falsehood and hiding some portions of their Book and thirdly, while they tried to guide other persons to the path of rectitude, themselves they failed to observe what was good and right.

The first remark about taking a mean price for the Divine message has been explained as consisting in giving up the observance of parts of their revealed Book or regarding them as of little practical importance because of their pre-occupation with their material interests or desires. It is also said that some of their rulers showered wealth and honour on religious scholars with a view to tempting them to keep certain commandments concealed from the people in general. Some scholars have argued from this that no remuneration should be obtained from the Muslims for teaching the Book of God and other religions sciences, while others are of opinion that though it is not commendable to do so, Muslim scholars are not totally forbidden from receiving remuneration.[9] Al-Shawkānī says[10] that this verse forbids scholars from concealing the arguemnts of God which they have

been commanded to preach to the common people.

In effect the verse forbids evasion of law in any form, for in any community in which, by false interpretation or through other forms of manipulation people try to disregard the laws under which they live, a mental attitude is fostered which strikes at the very root of honest thinking and honest living.

As regards the second statement that they should avoid clotting falsehood with truth or concealing the truth itself, this has been explained as consisting in the attempt to import into the Scripture materials foreign to it. Perhaps the reference is to the Jewish oral law which so much preoccupied the Jews that they almost forgot the revealed Word of God. It has also been taken to mean that the revealed Books should not be explained to the people in such a manner that, instead of clarifying doubtful points, the Scriptures should become more incomprehensible to them.[11] Another interpretation of hiding the truth is that religious scholars have been asked to explain to the people the arguments contained in the Scriptures which it is incumbent on them to place before the people in clear terms. If they fail to do so, they will have failed in carrying out an important divine commandment and will thus be guilty of concealing the truth which should be made public.

But whatever the interpretation of this verse, it stresses a very important point and it is that moral honesty is something different from legal quibbling. The man who is attached to truth and is morally honest does not look for excuses to avoid obedience to legal commands, nor does he put laboured interpretations on them in order to extricate himself from the

hardship involved in the observance of law. Where the habit of avoiding the hardships imposed by legal commands becomes common, it is likely to engender indiscipline which leads to the disintegration of society.

Yet another point stressed by the Qur'ān in the above verses with reference to the Jews is that while they preach virtue and goodness to others, they are themselves most forgetful of the requirements of virtue.

In explanation of this verse, al-Suyūṭī[13] quotes a tradition from Ibn 'Abbās which says that the verse was revealed with respect to the Jews of Madīnah, because some of the Jews said to their Muslim relations (i.e., Jews converted to Islam) and other Muslims with whom they had friendly relations that they should stick to the religion which they followed and to what had been commanded by the Prophet, because his commands were just. They advised others in this manner but themselves did the opposite.

According to a tradition quoted by al-Shawkānī, the verse[14] refers to the preachers and orators of the Muslim community who ask others to practise virtue but them selvesremain forgetful of its requirements. The Prophet was shown the punishment that would be meted out to such persons, on the night of his Ascension (*Laylāt al-Mi'rāj*). Al-Shawkānī quotes another tradition which states that the example of a scholar who teaches goodness to others but does not practise it himself, is like that of a lamp which sheds light for others but consumes itself in the process. A third tradition quoted by al-Shawkānī says : "Woe to him once who does not know and if God so willed could know (learn)

it, but woe to him seven times who knows but does not practise what he knows."

The lesson that the Qur'ân wants to drive home is that what you preach, you should also practise else your effort will be wasted. The verse, in fact, has a very wide field of application, since in modern times democracy has been preached by those who have, in practice, subverted it; non-violence has been preached by countries which make or try to make aggressive wars on others; and, similarly, lip-service has been paid to religion by peoples and groups who really have no intention of fulfilling its requirements. All this is done in order to deceive others consciously or unconsicously. The net result is that this tends to breed hypocrisy in the people who get used to it ; and hypocrisy undermines love of truth and honest living (i.e., a life lived in accordance with the requirements of justice, fairplay and straightforwardness).

Among the moral weaknesses from which Jewish society suffered in general was the habit of violating its covenants and the agreements which it had made with other people. This has been referred to by the Qur'ân in the verses, "And We indeed have revealed to thee clear messages, and none disbelieve in them except the transgressors. Is it that whenever they make a covenant, a party of them casts it aside? Nay, most of them have no faith. And when there came to them a Messenger from Allâh verifying that which they have, a party of those who were given the Book threw the Book of Allâh behind their backs as if they knew nothing" (II : 99-101). According to some commentators, the covenant mentioned in these verses as having been cast aside and the throwing of the Book behind the backs, both refer to the

Israelites paying no heed to the prophecy in Deut., 18 : 18 which was verified by the advent of the Holy Prophet.[15]

Al-Alūsī,[16] however, quotes 'Aṭā' as saying that the verse refers to those Jews who made a treaty with the Prophet of Islam (in al-Madīnah), i.e., Banū Qaynuqā,' Banū Naḍīr, and Banū Qurayẓah, and then violated its terms.

Al-Shawkānī[17] says that the "Book of God" refers to the Torah which had described in clear terms the characteristics of the Prophet whose advent was promised. He adds, however, that the expression may also possibly refer to the Qur'ān, because it confirmed the truth that was with the Jews (Torah), but The Jews cast aside the Qur'ān, i.e. refused to believe in it. The words "as if they knew nothing", he argues, support this view, for the Jews knew from the Torah that they were required to believe in the Prophet of Islam.

Al-Rāzī[18] is of the opinion that the way in which the Qur'ān mentions the covenant, "Is it wthat whenever they make a covenant, a party of them casts it aside" shows that this had been a regular habit of the Jews and was not something altogether new. Their ancestors too had been guilty of breaking covenants. Another point stressed by al-Rāzī is that when the Qur'ān says that a party of them cast the Book aside, the Book referred to here cannot be the Qur'ān, which was rejected by the entire Jewish community. It can only refer to the Torah which indicated the qualities and signs of the Prophet whose advent was promised. As for the expression "as if they know it not", it only shows that the section of the Jews, which cast the Book aside, was the section which had a scholarly knowledge of the Torah.

But whatever particular fact or inciddent the verse may refer to, its general import cannot be questioned, for the Qur'ān insists upon the Muslims to observe their pacts and agreements most scrupulously ; "And the the performers of their promise when they make a promise" (II:177). It is certain by great moral weakness in a nation if it fails to fulfil its pledges or breaks the agreements it has made with other people. Such a habit not only lowers it in the estimation of others but also makes it difficult to win friends and allies.

The Qur'ān has again and again condemned the Jews for their acquisitiveness which they exhibited in different ways. For example, in the Chapter on Women (Sūrah *al-Nisā'*), it says, "So far the iniquity of the Jews, We forbade them the good things which had been made lawful for them, and for their hindering many (people) from Allāh's way. And for their taking usury—though indeed they were forbidden it—and their devouring the property of people falsely. And We hve prepared for the disbelievers from among them a painful chastisement" (IV: 160-61). Commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī[19] says that sins can be classified under two major categories, injustice done to God's creatures and disregard of and indifference to religion. As regards the first category, the Qur'ān hints at it by saying that they hindreed people from following the path of God. To this, remarks al-Rāzī, they added an inordinate love of wealth which was evident from their habit of acquiring money by means of usury.

Similar comments have been made in the Qur'ān on the life and habits of the Jews in the following verses:

"And from among those who are Jews—they

are listeners for the sake of a like, listeners for another people who have not come to thee. They alter the words after they are put in their (proper) places, saying: if you are given this, take it, and if you are not given this, be cautious."[20] (V: 41).

The above verses refer to a particular incident during the life-time of the Prophet. It is said that a Jew from Khaybar and a Jews from the same place, both of them persons of high social standing, were found guilty of adultery. The Jews of Khaybar did not like to give them the punishment prescribed in the Torah for the offence, on account of their high position in society. They brought the case before the Prophet of Islam. When the Prophet awarded the Qur'ānic punishment of stoning, the Jews refused to accept it. The Prophet, thereupon, entrusted the case to one Ibn Sawrya who was known for his great learning and deep knowledge of Jewish Sacred Books. On his awarding the same punishment that was prescribed by the Prophet of Islam, the Jews mishandled him. What the Jews had done was to reduce the punishment for adultery to flogging. This is what constitutes "altering the words after they are put in their proper places".

According to al-Suyūṭī[21] the verse "they are listeners of lies" refers to the Jews of Madīnah, while the verse "listeners for another people who had come to thee" refers to the Jews of Fadak, while "altering the words that are put in their proper places" refers to the fact that the Jews of Fadak told the Jews of Madīnah that if the Prophet awarded the punishment of flogging, it should be accepted, but if he awarded the punishment of stoning, they should eschew him.

These verses have been explaine to mean that they Jews

were in the habit of accepting anything that was fabricated by their divines and scholars.[22] ('Hearing' has been rendered as 'accepting" and the fabrications of the Jewish divines have been treated as lies against God.) Another meaning possibly may be that they heard the speech of the Prophet of Islam only to tell lies against him by changing the words or expressions used by him or adding to them something on their own account. If the first interpretation is acceptaed, the Jews have beeen accused of leaving everything to the judgment of their religious scholars who interpreted their Sacred Books as they liked without being true to the letter and spirit of the revealed law. On the second interpretation, they have been accused of distorting the words' of the Prophet and fathering upon him statements which he never made. Another accusation brought against them is that they change the order of words in their Sacred Books in order to get at the meaning desired by them. All these things show that the Jews had very little sense of honesty and truthfulness left in them and gradually broke away from the discipline which their religion required of them, because whenever any system of law and ethics is twisted to suit individual convenience or fit in with temporary requirements by means of false interpretations, it loses its capacity of binding a peope into a well-knit and disciplined group or placing salutary restrictions on the natural tendency towards fulfilling one's own desires and interests without regard for the well-being of the other members of society.

The topic is continued by the Qur'ân in the following verses: "Listeners for the sake of a lie, devourers of '*suht*, (forbidden things) so if they come to thee, judge between them or turn away from them. And if thou turn away from them, they cannot harm thee at all. And if thou judge, judge between them with equity. Surely Allâh loves the equibtale.

And how do they make thee a judge and they have the Torah wherein is Allāh's judgement? Yet they turn away after that! And these are not believers. Surely We revealed the Torah, having guidance and light. By it did the Prophets who submitted themselves (to Allāh) judge for the Jews, and the rabbis and the doctors of law, because they were required to guard the Book of Allāh, and they were witnesses thereof. So fear not the poeple and fear Me, and take not a small price for My messages" (V:42-4).

According to Ibn Mas'ūd, the word '*suḥt* (bribe)' used in the verse consists in accepting gifts by people in authority for the sake of procuring justice for an aggrieved party or for restoration to a person of what belongs to him by right.[23] When Ibn Mas'ūd was told that some people understood by '*suḥt*' the acceptance of a bribe in some matter which involved the giving of a judgment, he said that such an act was tantamount to disbelief, as the Qur'ān says, "He who does not judge by what God has revealed is a disbeliever. Masrūq relates that he asked 'Umar whether '*suht*' or bribery related to the bases on which a judgment was given (contrary to the require ments of justice), he replied in the negative adding that consists in this: that a person has a high rank with a ruler. '*suḥt*' Someone needing the ruler's help in some matter approaches him but he would not help the needy man, until he has received a gift from him".

Some commentators[24] have formed the opinion on the basis of the above explanations that the people in power among the Israelites gave decisions in favour of the party which could bribe them even when the party could not make out a case for itself. Some say that the Jewish doctors of law obtained money from the wealtheir sections of the people and

to have said, "There is not a people amidst whom a man commits sins and they, being more influential and powerful (than he who sins), fail to prevent him but a punishment overtakes them all".

This particular moral weakness of the Jews is again criticised by the Qur'ān in the verse, "Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Israel were curesd by the tongue of David and Jesus, son of Mary.[26] This was because they disobeyed and exceeded the limits. They forbade not one another the hateful things they did" (V: 78-9).

Commenting on this verse, al-Suyūṭī quotes a tradition[27] in which the Prophet is said to have remarked that the general population of a community is not punished by God for the deeds of a particular section of the people, unless they see evil rampant amidst them and, despite having enough power, do not try to set matters right.

In other verses of the Qur'ān, the Jews have been criticised for having unnecessarily burdened themselves with minor rules and regulations which have the effect of severely limiting their freedom of action. "He (the Prophet of Islam) enjoins them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful to them the good things and prohibits for them impure things, and removes from them their burdens and the shackles which were on them" (VII: 157).

According to al-Rāzī, the burdens and fetters spoken of by the Qur'ān refer to the hardships imposed on them by the Mosaic law (and not to those minor rules which their learned men have framed for them), for example killing a person,as a token of repentance, and the severing of the limbs

the body of the culprit. These harsdhips were removed ıe Prophet of Islam who described his *Sharī'ah* (legal sys- as easy (to act upon) and characterised by a breadth of n and a spirit of accommodation (within limits).

Al-Suyūṭī,[29] on the other hand, quotes two traditions h give a different interpretation of the verse. Accord- o one of these, reaching back to Ibn 'Abbās, the burdens fetters refer to the covenants under which many things, ·wise lawful, had been made unlawful to the Jews. An- · tradition which reaches back to Sa'ād b. Jubayr inter- the burdens and fetters as the hardships imposed on the in the sphere of prescribed worship.

The Qur'ān traces all the evils and moral weaknesses ıe Jews and the Christians to the non-observance of the ne commandments contained in their Book: "And if people of the Book had believed, it would have been r for them. Some of them are believers but most of ı are transgressors" (III:109). Similarly, the Qur'ān "And if they had observed the Torah and the Gospel that which is revealed to them from their Lord, they would inly have eaten from above them and from beneath their ɔarty of them keeping to the moderate course; and most of —evil is that which they do" (V: 66).

A tradition[30] quoted by al-Suyūṭī and reaching back ıbayr states that the Prophet once said that knowledge on the verge of extinction. Jubayr remarked how this ı come about wehn they read the Qur'ān and taught it to children. The Prophet replied, "Is it not a fact that the and the Christians read their religious Books but this has saved them, when they ceased to observe the commands

of God?" and then the Prophet read out the verse, "if they had observed the Torah and the Gospel... " (V: 66).

Muslim commentators[31] understand by these verses that the observance of Torah and the Gospel for the Jews and the Christians necessarily implied belief in the prophethood of Muḥammad whose advent had been foretold in the Scriptures.

NOTES

Section A

1. Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Cairo, 1308 A.H., V: 50-1.
2. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, 1375 A.H., II:442.
3. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:63.
4. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, p. 448.
5. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:62.
6. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, V:448.
7. The Old Testament story says that Joseph had two dreams and when he related them to his father, the latter felt jealous and said, "what is this dream that you have dreamt? Shall I and your mother and your brothers come indeed to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" Similarly, his brothers remarked, "Are you indeed to reign over us?" (Genesis, 37:5-10). This version of Joseph's dream and its reaction on his father and brothers is highly improbable. In the first place, no father would feel jealous if he hears a prediction about the future greatness of his son. Secondly, it is far more probable, as the Qur'ān says, that knowing the jealousy of his brothers, Joseph's father should have advised him not to speak of his dream to his brothers. Another difference in the two versions of the story is that while the Qur'ān says that Jacob felt perturbed when Joseph's brothers requested him to permit them to take out Joseph with them

and expressed the fear that some beast might kill him, the Old Testa ment says that when his brothers went to pasture their flocks nea Schechem, Joseph's father said to him, "Are not your brothers pastur ing the flock at Schechem, come, I will send you to them?" Th seems highly improblabe, for it is known that Jacob loved Josep above all his sons and he also knew that Joseph's brothers wer jealous of him. How could he, then, ask Joseph to go to his brothers It is far more true to human nature that the brothers themselves aske permission of their father to take Joseph with them and he, fearin that their jealousy or carelessness might endanger his life, gave th permission only after his brothers had given personal assurances tha they would look after him. Thus, the Qur'ān is truer to nature tha the Old Testament.

8. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:114.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
11. *Ibid.*, IV:277-8.
12. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, III:108.
13. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, III:379.
14. Al-Zamakhsharī. *Kashshāf*, Cairo, 1354 A.H., III:156.
15. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, VI:395.
16. Al-Suyūṭī. *op. cit.*, V:120'.
17. In the Old Testament, Moses appears, not as the leader of a universa monotheistic movement but as having a mission exclusively addressec to a particular racial group, i.e., the Israelites. The Old Testamen version of the story is that Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness'. But Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go'. Then the said,'The God of the Hebrews has met with us; let us go, we pray," (Exodus, 5:1-2). Such phrases in the above passage as 'the Go of Israel' and 'the God of the Hebrews' show that the Old Testament represents Moses as being charged with an exclusive mission towards the Israelites. In fact, according to the above account, Moses

does not even care to explain to the Pharaoh what sort of God he and his people worshipped, when the latter asked him, 'Who is thy Lord?' The Qur'ānic account of Moses puts both Moses and his God in a different light for, according to the Qur'ān, when the Pharaoh asked him the question as to who his God was, Moses replied, "Our Lord is He Who gave unto everything its nature then guided it aright.... Who hath appointed the earth as a bed and hath threaded roads for you therein and hath sent down water from the sky and thereby we have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation, (saying): Eat ye and feed your cattle. Lo! herein verily are portents for men of thought. Thereof, We created you, and thereunto We return you, and thence We bring you forth a second time. And We verily did show him all Our tokens, but he denied them and refused' (XX:50-56). According to the Qur'ān, then, the message of Moses was meant not only for the Israelites but also for the Egyptians and even for Pharaoh, and that Moses did reckon with the possibility of Pharaoh's conversion. Therefore, he tried to explain to him what sort of god he was whom he and his followers worshipped. But the Old Testament makes not the slightest hint in regard to the universal nature of the message of Moses. For this very reason there is no mention in the Old Testament of the conversion of the magicians to the creed of Moses on their realizing that Moses was not a sorcerer but a Prophet inspired by God and sent by Him to preach to all mankind. The only remark made by the magicians after their failure, according to the Old Testament, is that they said to the Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus, 8:19). So there was a partial realization on the part of the magicians of the fact that Moses had the support of God behind him. But this realization did not lead to their conversion, as it did according to the Qur'ānic version of the story. In fact, the Qur'ān says that faith in the religion of Moses struck such deep roots in the heart of the magicians that when the Pharaoh threatened that he would crucify them after torturing them physically, they remained not only unmoved but exclaimed, "Our Lord! Vouchsafe unto us steadfastness and make us die as men who have surrendered (unto Thee)" (VII:126).

18. Ibn Kaṯẖīr says that the commentators have differed in their interpretation of the verse, "Appoint houses for your people in Egypt"

etc. According to Sufyān al-Thawrī and some others, it means that the Israelites were ordered to make mosques (places of worship) in their houses. Another interpretation given by the same scholar (Sufyān al-Thawrī) and a few others like Mujāhid, Abū Mālik, Rabī, b. Anas, etc., says that the Israelites were afraid of the Egyptians. Therefore, they were ordered to offer their prayers in their homes. This happened when the attitude of the Pharaoh and his chiefs hardened against the Israelites and they began to intensify their persecution (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, II:428-9).

The matter becomes clear from a Tradition quoted by al-Suyūṭī from Mujāhid on the authority of Ab'ūl Shaykh and others which says that the Israelites did not pray except (publicly) in their synagogues until they were afraid of the Pharaoh (and his government). Therefore, they were ordered to worship and offer their prayers at home (Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, III:314).

19. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, V:21-2.

20. Ibn Kathīr narrates many Traditions in his commentary to explain the word '*mulūk*' or 'kings' used by the Qur'ān which show that any person among the Israelites who had a wife, a house and a servant was called a 'King'. Ibn Kathīr quotes Sa'dī as explaining the verse "He made you kings" by remarking that a person had kingly authority if he owned himself (i.e. was not a slave), his wealth and his wife and children. As regards the verse "He gave you that which He gave not to any other of His creatures". Ibn Kathīr says that the Israelites were the best people of their time, compared to the Copst (Egyptians) and Greeks, etc. (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, II:36-7).

Al-Suyūṭī also quotes similar and sometimes identical Traditions to explain the term 'king', In one of these, from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, 'the king' is said to own, among other things already mentioned, an animal (for riding). The two persons who feared (their Lord) and who volunteered to enter the land by the gate are said to have been Joshua and Caleb. But al-Suyūṭī also records a Tradition from Sa'īd b. Jubayr which says that these two persons were from the enemy (the Amalekites) but they followed the religion of Moses. A similar Tradition from Ḍaḥḥāk quoted by al-Suyūṭī says that

the two persons lived in the city of the Amalekites, though they followed the religion of Moses. This seems more probable because the hint that the Israelites should enter the city by the gate shows that they knew some important military secrets of the enemy. About the punishment announced for the wrong-doers that they shall wander in the land for forty years, al-Suyūṭī quotes a Tradition which says that it means that the towns were forbidden to the Israelites, so that they could not enter any town or city (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:269-71).

Al-Rāzī puts forward a number of explanations for the word 'king' used by the Qur'ān. He gives the opinion of Sa'dī according to whom the Qur'an says that God made you free men and, after remaining under the subjection of the Copts, you are now in full possession and control of yourselves. The second interpretation advanced by al-Rāzī is that every Prophet is a ruler or a king, because he is in command over the affairs of his community (*ummah*), and he has the power to dispose them of. Moreover, he executes the commands which is, in other words, kingly power. According to Ḍaḥḥāk, adds al-Rāzī, the homes of the Israelites were quite spacious with a plentiful supply of water; they had a large amount of wealth and a great number of attendants. Therefore, they have been called 'kings' (cf. al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, III:384-7).

21. In commenting on the verse, al-Suyūṭī quotes a Tradition which goes back to Abū'i 'Āliyah who says that God appointed the forty nights referred to in the verse at the item when Moses left his companions (people) behind and Aaron deputized for him. Moses stayed on the Mount of Sinai for forty days and here was revealed to him the Torah in (the form) of tablets and God came closer to him and talked to him and Moses came down from the mountain (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.z* I:69).

22. As regards the calf which the Israelites began to worship, al-Rāzī says that, in general, the commentators have said that when Moses left his people and proceeded to Mount Sinai, he advised his brother Aaron not to follow the way of the wrong doers. At this time, it is said, the Israelites had with them all the clothes and ornaments that they borrowed from the Copts. Aaron told them that those clothes and ornaments were unlawful and he, therefore, asked them to *burn*

the articles they had borrowed from the Copts. Al-Rāzī rejects the story of the golden calf on two grounds. First, he says that every sensible person knows for evident reasons that an idol neither moves nor possesses any kind of feeling, nor yet it has any kind of understanding. Secondly, the Israelites had seen before this a series of mighty miracles so convincing and so confirmatory of the truth of Mosaic teachings that it was well nigh impossible for them to believe that an idol made of gold and silver could be their God, even though it gave forth a voice like that of a living calf.

The Biblical version of the story is different. The Old Testament says that it was Aaron who made the calf on the persuasion of the Israelites themselves, when Moses' return from the Mount of Sinai was delayed. From the Islamic viewpoint, this is unbelievable since a Prophet can never be guilty of such an act.

23. Ibn Kathīr quotes many Traditions regarding this incident. One from Ibn 'Abbās says that those who had worshipped the calf were made to sit down, while those who did not worship stood up with their swords in hand. They were then enveloped by darkness and each one began to kill the other. When darkness disappeared, it was found that seventy thousand had fallen, but God granted pardon both to those who had been killed and those who had killed them (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.,* I:92-3).

    Al-Rāzī's interpretation of this verse is that it is quite possible that in the Mosaic law, the repentence of the apostate was completed only after he had resigned himself to the punishment of death. He also refers to the interpretation given by the Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār who says that it is wrong to explain the verse as meaning that everyone who had repented (from calf-worship) should kill himself. Al-Rāzī, discussing this interpretation concludes that perhaps the Mosaic law permitted the killing of the apostate either in general or in particular cases.

24. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:336-7.
25. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:68.
26. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, I:88-9.
27. According to a number of Traditions related by Ibn Kathīr, the story relates to seventy persons whom Moses took with him (to the

Mount of Sinai). They heard the words (of God) but said that they would not believe in God until they saw Him plainly (i.e., face to face). Therefore, a lightning overtook them and struck them dead. Moses stood weeping over them and prayed to God saying how he would explain the matter to the Israelites when he returned to them (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, I:93).

According to al-Râzī, this incident may either relate to the period after the Israelites had been punished for calf-worship or to the period that preceded it. According to Muhammad b. Ishâq, adds al-Râzī, when Moses returned from the Mount of Sinai, he saw his people worshipping the calf and said to his brother and to Sâmari whatever he had to say. Then he burnt the calf and threw its ashes into the sea. Thereafter, he chose seventy persons of virtuous conduct from among the Israelites. They proceeded to the Mount Sinai where they were made tó hear , on their own request, God speaking to Moses. But even after this they said that they would not believe in God until they had seen Him plainly (i.e. face to face). Therefore, God struck them dead.

28. Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, I:98-9.
29. As regards the covenant referred to above, al-Râzī says that the covenant referred to in these Qur'ânic verses has been variously interpreted by the commentators. According to one interpretation, the covenant refers to those arguments in favour of the existence of the Maker and the truth of His Prophets and messengers with which the intellect of man has been naturally endowed. The second interpretation is that of 'Abd al-Rahmân b. Zayd b. Aslam that when Moses returned from Sinai with the Tablets, he said to the Israelites that it contained the Book of God but they said that they would not accept his word until they saw God face to face. Therefore, God struck them dead, but later brought back them to life.

    In regard to their turning away mentioned by the Qur'ân, al-Râzī says that the Israelites corrupted the Torah and ceased to observe its commands in practice. Further they started killing their prophets and disobeying their commands (al-Râzī, *op. cit.*, I:370-71).
30. Ibn Kathīr also quotes a tradition reaching back to Mujâhid which says that the Qur'ânic words 'God turned them into apes' should not

be taken in their literal sense, for these people did not become apes. What the Qur'ān means is that their souls were corrupted. Ibn Kathīr, however, disagrees with the interpretation of Mujāhid (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, I:105-7).

Al-Suyūṭī quotes a Tradition from Ḥasan which says that the Israelites who broke the Sabbath left no descendants. Another tradition quoted by him from Ibn 'Abbās through al-Mundhar says that the words 'despised' and 'hated' used in the Qur'ān mean 'made small' (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:75-6).

31. The Biblical version of the story contains no general remark, as to the nature of kingship and the qualifications of a ruler as does the Qur'ānic version. The Old Testament says:

"Now Samuel called people toegther to the Lord at Mizpah; and he said to the people of Israel: Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the hands of the Egyptians and from the hands of all the kingdoms that were oppressing you, but you have this day rejected your God saves you from all your calamities and your distresses; and you have said, 'No' but set a king over us. Now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands. Then, Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the family of the Matrites was taken by lot; finally he brought the family of the Matrites near man by man and Saul, the son of Kish, was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. So they inquired again of the Lord, 'Did the men come hither' and the Lord said, 'Behold he has hiddden himself among the baggage'. Then they ran and fetched him from there; and when he stood among the people he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upwards. And Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people'. And all the people shouted, 'Long live the King" (I Smauel 10, 17-24).

It will be seen from this version that the Old Testament makes no comment on the views of those who thought that Saul could not save them, while the Qur'ān comes forward with the remark that it

is not riches and wealth that qualify a man to rule over his people or lead them but his physical strength and knowledge (of human affairs).

Al-Suyūṭī quotes a number of Traditions which show that the Israelites objected to the oppointment of Saul, because he belonged neither to the tribe of Levi (in which was vested priesthood/prophethood) nor did he belong to the tribe of Judah in which kingship had been hereditary. One of these Traditions reaching back to Wahb b. Munabbih interprets the qualification of knowledge referred to by the Qur'ān as the knowledge of (the art of) war. It is also stated by these Traditions that the people who had driven out the Israelites from their homes were the Amalekites (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:316).

Al-Ālūsī says that the Qur'ānic remark that God had increased him abundantly in wisdom and stature contains a significant hint that mental and spiritual qualities enjoy precedence over merely physical qualities, because wisdom has been mentioned first and stature next ('al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, II:167).

32. Al-Rāzī explains the ordeal to which the Israelites were subjected as being due to the fact that they were well known for their opposition to their prophets and rulers, in spite of the signs and wonders to which they had been witnesses. Therefore, God willed to have a sign by means of which He could distinguish, before the actual engagement took place, those who could bear the brunt of the battle from those who could not, because to leave the field while the battle is in progress has a much graver effect than leaving it before the commencement of the battle. Another reason, in al-Rāzī's opinion, for the ordeal was to habituate them to a life of hardship.

Al-Rāzī also discusses the import of the Qur'ānic verse, "But they drank thereof, all save a few of them." He says that these Israelites were very unwilling to undertake the rigours of war. Therefore, most of them drank from the canal and thus got disqualified from participation in the war. They were left behind, while those who obeyed the word of God (i.e. did not drink from the canal or drank only a little) were strengthened in their hearts and faith and were able to cross the canal safely (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, II:398-9).

Al-Ālūsī is of the opinion that those who expressed the hope

that they would be meeting their Maker were more sincere than those who were overpowered with the fear of Goliath and his armies. Similarly their faith was much stronger and deeper than those of others. others. This does not mean, however, that those others who were afraid of Goliath and his armies lacked sincerity altogether or that they were men of no faith, because there were varying shades of belief and sincerity among the believing Israelites (al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, II:171).

33. Ibn Kathīr explains this verse as meaning that the leaders and men of knowledge among the Israelites tried to encourage the rest of the army by telling them that the promise of God is true because help and victory come from God and not from numerical superiority or inferiority (Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, I:303)

34. Al-Rāzī explains this verse in a number of ways. First, he says, it may mean that God saves some people from disbelief by means of others. These saviours and defenders are the prophets and the religious leaders, because they are the people who stop men from falling into disbelief by adducing arguments and proofs in favour of religion, just as the Qur'ān says, "This is the Book which We have revealed to thee... , so that We may bring men out of darkness into light" (V: 16). Secondly, it may mean that God defends (protects) some men from sins and acts disapproved of by religion by means of other men. On this presupposition, the defenders or saviours are those who command people to do the good and stop them from doing evil, in accordance with the Qur'ānic verse, "You are the best community that God has made to appear. You command the people to do that which is good and forbid them to do evil" (III:110). Thirdly, the verse may mean that if God did not protect some persons from disorders and disturbances caused by others, the world might be plunged into anarchy (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, II:302-3).

35. Commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī says that some of the commentators are of the opinion that the apparent meaning of the verse is that David was vested with kingship and prophethood as soon as he killed Goliath. because God's entrusting David with wisdom and rulership has been mentioned immediately after his slaying of Goliath. But the majority of the commentators do not share this view. They are of opinion that it was seven years after his victory over Goliath that David became the ruler of the Israeiltes.

As regards wisdom, al-Rāzī says that it consists in setting things in their proper place, so as to rectify them and it is done properly only by a prophet. Therefore, it is qiute probable wisdom that here may mean prophethood (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, II:301-2).

36. According to Ibn Kat͟hīr, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, David gave the decision that the sheep which had browsed in the field should become the property of the owner of the field. There upon, the shepherds took out the sheep with which were also some dogs. When Solomon saw them, he said that if he had been in charge of the affair, he would have given another decision. When David heard of this, he asked Solomon as to how he would decide the matter. Solomon told him that the sheep should be given (temporarily) to the owner of the field so that the milk of the sheep together with any off spring that the sheep may have and all other advantages, should go to the owner of the field, and the owner of the sheep should sow and cultivate the field for the benefit of its owner, until the crop had reachd the stage at which it was when the sheep had browsed in it, the owner of the field would take it and return the sheep to their owner.

    Another Tradition quoted by Ibn Kat͟hīr, comes from Masrūq which gives a slightly different version (Ibn Kat͟hīr, *op. cit.*, III:186.

37. Commentators like Ibn Kat͟hīr and al-Ālūsī have given many stories to show how Solomon had commanded the winds (Ibn Kat͟hīr, *op. cit.*, III:178 and al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, XVII:77). We need not take these stories at their face value but it is clear from the verses of the Qur'ān that Solomon had some control over the winds (al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, XVII:78).

38. In explaining this verse, al-Rāzī says that the Jews were always interested in black magic and tried to get other persons also interested in it. As regards God's saying, "Follow that which the devil falsely related against the kingdom of Solomon", al-Rāzī says that the verse may have been addressed either to the Jews who lived during the time of the Prophet of Islam or to the Jews who lived during the reign of Solomon and who believed in magic, because many Jews denied that Solomon was a Prophet and regarded him merely as one of the rulers who had nothing to do with religion as such. Therefore, it is not impossible that many of the Jews contemporary to him believed

that Solomon built his kingdom, because of the power of magic which he had at his command.

Al-Rāzī says that Muslim scholars have disagreed as to the meaning of the word 'devil'. Most of them think that it refers to evil-minded (devilish) genii but the Muta*kallimūn* (scholastics) hold that it refers to evil-natured human beings.

On the other hand, al-Rāzī adds, those who think that the word 'devils' used in the Qur'ān refers to evil-natured men narrate the story that Solomon had buried under his throne many (scrolls of) sciences which he had received as a special gift from God, in the expectation that if the knowledge of these sciences perished with him, the buried treasure would still remain. After some time a party of hypocrites mixed a good deal of magical writings in the books left by Solomon. The common people thought that all this was Solomon's work and that he had attained to his power and glory on account of these things.

When, therefore, after Solomon's death, the people took out the books from under his throne, and thought that all their contents went back to Solomon, this amounted to a calumny against Solomon's kingdom (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, 1:428).

39. Al-Rāzī gives three explanations as to why God sent these two angels to teach black magic to the common people: (i) the magicians multiplied in those days and developed many strange branches of magic. These magicians also laid claim to prophethood, and urged the people to accept them as such. Therefore, God sent these two angels that they might teach them magic with the object of enabling them to argue with those who claimed prophethood. (ii) The knowledge that a miracle is the very antithesis of magic can come only from the knowledge of the nature of a miracle and not that of magic. But the people were ignorant of the nature of magic. Therefore, it was difficult for them to understand the nature of a miracle. (iii) It is possible that magic which enabled a man to create a rift among the enemies of God may have been considered permissible in those days. By this same magic, they caused the friends of God to forget their differences and disputes and come together in unity. So God sent these two angels to teach the magic to the people for this very object. But

when they had learned magic, they employed it for a very different purpose, i.e., they created disunity among the friends of God.

40. According to the Old Testament, "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David, his father; only, he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places. And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place;Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings upon that altar" (I Kings, 3:3-4). Again, "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women; the daughter of Pharaoh, and Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods; Solomon clung to those in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord His God, as was the heart of David, his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after *Milcom* the abomination of the Ammonites. So solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for *Moloch* the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore, the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your mind and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant" (I Kings II, I-11).

Section (B)

1. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān*, Lahore, 1951, pp. 41-2; marginal *f.n.* 132.

2. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:414-5.

3. Explaining the word *Ḥanīf* used in the first verse (translated as 'upright'), al-Rāzī says that this word refers to a person who submits to the religion of Abraham. It is known, he adds that Abraham came with a particular set of laws. For example, he instituted the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the rite of circumcision and other customs. The Arabs, according to al-Rāzī accepted the religious system of Abraham but later they corrupted it with polytheism. That is why the Qur'ān speaks of the religion of Abraham, the *Ḥanīf* (upright one) *who was not a polytheist* (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:502).

   Al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn 'Abbās as saying that *Ḥanīf* meant one who performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Muḥammad b. Ka'b, on the other hand, says that *Ḥanīf* means the straight or the upright one. According to Khāsif, *Ḥanīf* means the sincere one (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:140).

   As regards the second verse, al-Rāzī, says that the Jews and the Christians tried to mislead the Muslims and make them sceptical by claiming salvation exclusively for the followers of their own religion. The Muslims, on the other hand, made the counter-assertion that salvation could be attained only by submitting oneself to the will of God and obeying His commands. This, in effect, meant that the Jews and the Christians could not hope for salvation unless they changed their way of life, submitted to God and lived a life of virtue. Thus they were persuaded to accept Islam (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:454).

4. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:84.
5. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:419.

6. Al-Suyūṭī (*op. cit.*, I:89) quotes two Traditions in connection with these verses of the Qur'ān. One of them from Abū'l 'Āliyah says that the Jews and Christians claimed that none could enter paradise except the people who belonged to their community and also that they were the sons of God and beloved of His. Therefore, God revealed the verse that if the abode (of bliss) in the hereafter was exclusively meant for them, they should long for death, if they were truthful. But they did not do so. Another Tradition reaching back to Ibn 'Abbās is that God commanded the Prophet to tell them that if they really believed that paradise was exclusively meant for them to the

exclusion of the believers (Muslims), then they should long for death. But the Jews refused to take up the challenge of the Prophet and thoroughly disliked what they were asked to do. Then the last part of the verse was revealed saying, "They will never invoke it on account of what their hands have sent as before" (II:95).

7. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:412.

8. According to Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī (of Lahore) "the reference in these words is to the terms of the original treaty under which the Jews were bound to ransom the Muslims, if they were made captives by the enemy. They did not openly repudiate the treaty but intrigued with the enemy to turn the Muslims out of Medinah. The reference to believing in a part of the book and disbelieving in the other is to this conduct of the Jews. Most commentators, however, understand that the reference here is to the alliance which the two Jewish tribes, Quraiẓah and Naḍīr living side by side at Medinah, had made with Aus and Khazraj, the two rival tribes of Medinah respectively. When the latter fought against each other, their allies took part in the fighting and thus one Jewish tribe slaughtered and imprisoned the other and laid waste their habitations, but afterwards collected subscriptions for the release of Jewish prisoners, on the ground that the law commanded them to redeem the prisoners, and they fought against their co-religionists for the honour of their allies. The punishment and disgrace which they are threatened with at the end of the verse was witnessed by all the three Jewish tribes of Medinah, on account of their violation of the treaty, and their making secret alliances with the enemies of Islam in the hope that they would succeed in turning the Muslims out of Medinah (*The Holy Qur'ān*, Lahore' 1951, pp. 39-40).

Al-Ālūsī says that God had taken a covenant from the Jews concerning three matters. First, they would give up killing each, other. Secondly, they would not expel one another from their home; thirdly, they would ransom prisoners. But they killed and expelled one another in violatoin of their covenant. On the other hand, they fulfilled the convenant in so far as they ransomed prisoners. The same commentator also says that the verse may mean that the Jews did not believe that part of the Book, in which the advent of the Prophet of Islam had been predicted (al-Ālūsī, *Tafsīr*, Cairo, n.d., I:313).

9. Al-Ālūsī, *op. cit* I:245.
10. Al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-Qadīr*, Cairo, 1349 A.H. I:60.

    Some Muslim commentators have interpreted this verse to mean that no remuneration should be demanded for teaching another (the knowledge of religion) (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:64).
11. Al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, I:296.
12. Al-Shawkānī, *op. cit.*, I:61.
13. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, I:64.
14. Al-Shawkānī, *lp. cit.*, I:65.
15. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, op. *cit.*, p. 44, f.n. 143.
16. Al-Ālūsī, *op. cit.*, I:335.
17. Al-Shawkanī, *op. cit.*, I:101.
18. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, I:436-7.
19. *Ibid.*, III:341.
20. *Ibid.*, III:403.
21. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:282.
22. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, III:404.
23. Al-Suyūṭī *op. cit.*, II:283-8.
24. Al-Rāzī,, *op. cit.*, III:405.
25. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:296.
26. Commenting on this verse, Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī (*op. cit* p. 265, *f.n.* 725) of Lahore says, "The curse is being used here in its original sense of being removed further off from Divine mercy. Both the Prophets had warned the Jews that their transgressions called for Divine punishment which should soon overtake them if they did not mend their ways. The time of both was followed by great afflictions overtaking the Jews, in the respective depredations of the Babylonian kings and the destruction wrought by Titus."

    According to al-Rāzī, those of the Israelites who were cursed by David were the persons who violated the law of Sabbath by catching fish on the Sabbath day, while those whom Christ cursed were the persons who had asked Jesus to cause heavenly food to descend upon them, but when Jesus Christ did, by his prayers, cause the food to

descend upon them, they still refused to believe in him (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, III:535).

Al-Suyūṭī gives the following Tradition narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd in connection with the above verse, "Before you, among the Israelites, there were people who, when they committed an evil, were forbidden by some person to do so. But the next day the same person who forbade them sat with the evil-doers and partook of their meals, as if he did not see them committing the evil the day before. When God saw this, He made them hate one anothr and cursed them with the tongue of Jesus, son of Mary. This was because they disobeyed and were trasngressors. By Him in Whose hands is the life of Muḥammad, you shall command people to do good and forbid them from doing evil and you shall take away from the hands of the evil-doers (the power to do evil), and encourage him to do the right, else God will make you hate one another and curse you as He cursed them (the Jews) (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:305)

27. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:302.
28. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit* IV:299.
29. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, III:135
30. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:297.
31. See the Tradition reaching back to Mujāhid in al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:297. Also see f.n. 717 on page 126 of Muḥammad 'Ali's commentary which reads, "If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel which contained clear prophecies of the Prophet's advent, they would have believed in the revelation of the Qur'ān as well. the eating from above is in reference to spiritual blessing and eating from beneath their feet signifies earthly provisions, i.e. they would have had abundance of both. The attitude of liberality adopted by Islam towards its most implacable foes is remarkable. Not-withstanding their strong enmity to Islam, a party of the Jews and the Christians is described as keeping to the moderate course".

CHAPTER V

COMMENTS OF THE QUR'AN ON CHRISTIAN HISTORY

The Qur'ān begins its comments on Christian history by repudiating the Judaeo-Christian claim to a special place in the history of mankind. "Truly Allāh chose Adam and Noah and the descendants of Abraham and the descendents of 'Imrān[1] above the nations" (III: 33). As 'Imrān[2] (son of Mā<u>th</u>ān), according to some Traditions, was the father of Mary, the Qur'ān here brackets the family of Jesus Christ, with the family of Abraham from whom was descended the Prophet of Islam in order to establish the true position of Muḥammad as a Prophet of God like Christ. The Qur'ān maintains, in effect, that Jesus enjoys no unique position in history. If God chose his family for a certain purpose, so did He choose the family of Muḥammad and that of his Companions from the Quray<u>sh</u> who were descended from Abraham. The object seems to be to refute the Christian assertion that God made a sudden intervention in history through Jesus. The Qur'ān maintains, on the other hand, that the guidance of God has been a continuous process beginning from Adam and ending with Muḥammad, so that Jesus or his people enjoy no special status, for Christ was only a link in the chain of those who transmitted the message of God to mankind.

It may be stressed here that although the Qur'ān speaks of choosing certain families, such as those of Abraham and

Amrān ('Imrān of the Qur'ān), the word does not convey the same meaning here as in Christian expressions, such as a 'chosen remnant'. St. Paul was the person who put forward the idea of 'the chosen remnant' because he could not get rid of the conviction that the Jews, in so far as they had become Christians, have, after all, a certain precedence with regard to history.[3] The Qur'ān denies that any people or any nation can enjoy such precedence, because the Qur'ān speaks only of the descendents of Abraham and Amrān as having been chosen for a particular mission, and this means that God sent a succession of Prophets from the descendants of Abraham and Amrān. There is not the slightest hint in the Qur'ān that a whole nation, merely because of the reason of its descent, can be treated by God with special favour.

Moreover, St. Paul associates choice with pure grace. "So too at the present time," writes Paul, "there is a remnant chosen by grace. But it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise grace would no longer be grace."[4]

In the Christian conception, if we are to accept St. Paul as its authoritative exponent, the choice of God is totally divorced from works. It is a matter of sheer grace and grace, according to Paul, would be no grace, if it had anything to do with works. The Qur'ānic idea is that God's choice can only fall on those who can justify themselves by their works. "And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain commands, he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make thee a leader of men. (Abraham) said: And of my off spring? My covenant does not include the wrongdoers, said He" (II:124). It is clear from these verses that according to the Qur'ān, the choice of God fell on Abraham not out of sheer grace but because, he was able to fulfil the Divine commands set to him, and

when Abraham asked God about his descendants, He refused to bestow his choice on those of Abraham's descendants who committed wrongs. Thus the Qur'ānic idea of choice is bound up with works, although it does not exclude grace. In fact, the Qur'ān does not envisage the dichotomy of grace and works in the manner of Christianity. Both are bound up with each other. This is further made clear by the Qur'ān in the verse, "Allāh has promised to these of you who believe and do good that He will surely make them rulers in the earth" (XXIV: 55). Here both faith (belief) and works have been made the necessary condition for bestowing the rulership of the world. This shows that God's grace is conditioned by the righteousness of human conduct. Therefore, history is not shaped by God's arbitrary decisions. It is not the sudden eruption of Gods' unknown transcendent will into an on-going process. Rather, history is made, according to the Qur'ān, largely by man's own decisions and acts. There is always a hidden hand pushing from behind. The finger of God writes its fiats on the scroll of history. But these fiats, far from being arbitrary, as the notion of pure grace would imply, are the outcome of human acts.

After these introductory remarks outlining the importance of Mary and Jesus, the Qur'ān says, "When a woman[5] of 'Imrān said: My Lord, I vow to Thee what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Thy service), so accept (it) from me" (III: 34). However, when a female child was born, the mother wondered whether she would be acceptable to God (cf. III: 36).

There are two explanations of why Mary's mother was doubtful as to whether her daughter would be accepted for the purpose of dedication to the Temple. First, one

dedicated to the Temple could not leave it at any time and had to sweep and clean it and keep guard over it. But a woman naturally suffered from the handicap of menses and, therefore, could not fulfil the requirements of the Temple servants.[6]

Another explanation[7] given by al-Rāzī is that anyone who served the Temple had to come into frequent contact with the priests and other servants of the Temple, and this was not desirable in the case of a woman. However, Mary was accepted by the priests for service and dedication to the Temple, because she was the daughter of 'Imrān who was their religious head and led the prayers in the Temple.

Referring to the unexpected decision of the priests to accept Mary as a servant of the Temple, the Qur'ān says, "So her Lord accepted her with a goodly acceptance and made her grow up a goodly growing, and gave her into the charge of Zacharias" (III: 36). Zacharias[8] was successful in having charge of Mary, because Mary's aunt, the mother of John the Baptist, was his wife.[9] Mary thus became dedicated to the service of the Temple and when she reached the age of puberty, she was informed that she would give birth to a child. "When the Angels said: O Mary, surely Allāh gives thee good news with a word from Him (of one) whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, worthy of regard in this world and the Hereafter, and of those who are drawn nigh (to Allāh). And he will speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age, and (he will be) one of the good ones. She said: My Lord, how can I have a son and man has not yet touched me? He said: Even so; Allāh creates what He pleases. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be' and it is. And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel. And (make him) a messenger to the Children

of Israel (saying): I have come to you with a sign from your Lord.... And (I am) a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and I allow you part of that which was forbidden to you..." (III: 45-50).

It is not clear from the Qur'ānic verses about the birth of Jesus whether the Qur'ān intends to establish the supernatural character of the birth of Jesus, though Muslim scholarship is generally agreed that Jesus was not born like ordinary mortals. There are very few scholars who disagree with this viewpoint.[10]

However, the object of the Qur'ān is to uphold the high position of Jesus against the Jews who accused him of being an illegitimate child. In the same manner they also charged Mary with immoral conduct and denied the prophethood of Jesus. The topic has been touched upon by the Qur'ān in another verse which says, "Then she came to her people with him, carrying him. They said: O Mary, thou hast indeed brought a strange thing! O sister of Aaron! thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother an unchaste woman! But she pointed to him. They said: how should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle? He said: I am indeed a servant of Allāh. He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live" (XIX: 27-31).

The second point stressed by the Qur'ān in the above verses is that Jesus Christ did not initiate a break from Judaism. On the other hand, he accepted the Torah and confirmed its truth. The Qur'ān also claims that Jesus did not abolish the Mosaic law. What he did was to relax some of the restrictions which the Mosaic law had placed on the Jews.

Commenting on this aspect of the matter, Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī says:

"The law given by Moses was upheld by all the Israelite prophets, but its deficiencies were removed and other changes introduced from time to toime to make it suit the need of new times. These changes are particularly marked out in Jesus' teachings, as any one who reads any of the Gospels, and specially the sermon on the Mount, can see."[11]

We now come to the alleged crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Qur'ān denies both and asserts that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross. The Qur'ān does not go into the details of Christ's life. After claiming that Jesus confirmed the truth of Torah and relaxed some of the restrictions laid upon the Jews by the Mosaic law, it says that when Jesus sensed that those before whom he preached truth were not disposed to believe in it, he called upon the small band of his followers to help him in the cause of God and they responded to his call. However, the Jews, in general, were not merely apathetic, but vigorously opposed him. "And (the Jews) planned and Allāh (also) planned. And Allāh is the best of planners" (III:53). This clearly shows that the Jews planned to put Jesus to death by crucifixion, but their plan was defeated by God and Jesus was saved. The Qur'ān then proceeds to remark, "When Allāh said: O Jesus, I will cause thee to die and exalt thee in My presence and clear thee of those who disbelieve and make those who follow thee above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return, so I shall decide between you concerning that wherein you differ" (III:55).

This re-opens the entire question of the end of Jesus Christ. The Bible asserts that the Jews killed him by cruci-

fixion. The Qur'ān denies that Jesus died on the cross or that his resurrection took place. But the Biblical accounts of the events leading up to the death of Jesus differ on some important points with every New Testament writer,[12] while the Qur'ānic account has been interpreted by various Muslim commentators in different ways. According to the majortiy of the Muslim commentators, Jesus did not suffer death but was bodily raised alive to Heaven[13] where he still lives and will descend to the earth sometime before the world is destroyed. This opinion, however, seems to be based no a misinterpretation of the words used by the Qur'ān and reflects the feelings of pious Muslims after the civil war between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah when they were distressed by by the pravailing unrest and the political disorders that shook the Muslim state during the days of the 'Abbāsids. Under such circumstances people eagerly looked forward to a deliverer and thought that he would appear in the person of al-Mahdī. There was also the added idea that the world would not last long and was nearing its end. Here there seems to have been a close resemblance to the state of mind which prevailed among the Jews during their exile to Babylon and which led them to expect the advent of a Messiah who would deliver them out of their woes. But Jesus changed the idea of a temporal deliverance into that of a spiritual deliverance which disappointed a large number of Jews who were waiting for a Messiah.

There is also a theory put forward by a modern commentator of the Qur'ān that although Jesus was nailed to the cross he did not die of crucifixion. His body was taken away by one of his disciples and he recovered from the shock and the

wounds inflicted on him. The rest of his life was passed by Jesus in disguise.[14]

According to al-Ālūsī, the Qur'ānic word *'mutawaffīka'* which has been used in the verse, "When Allāh said: O Jesus! I will cause thee to die" (III:54) means: "I will complete thy term of life and cause thee to die on thy death-bed and that I will not allow thine enemies to overpower thee and kill thee. The reference here is to the fact that Jesus will be saved from his enemies".[15] Similarly, commenting on the Qur'ānic verse, "they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such... " (IV:157), al-Ālūsī says, "accordng to Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, the chiefs of the Jews took a man, then they killed him and crucified him in an elevated place, so that no one could approach him. The dead man's features became distorted. Then the Jews said: 'We have killed Jesus', so that the common people in their community might get the false impression that the Jews desired to convey. This was because they had surrounded the house in which Jesus was staying, but when they entered the house they did not find him. Now they were afraid that this might lead the ordinary Jew to believe in the truth of Jesus. Therefore, they resorted to the trick referred to above".[16]

Putting together the views expressed by all the above Muslim commentators, we may safely assert that although the consensus of opinion among the Muslim scholars is that Jesus was taken alive to the Heavens, this opinion is not unambiguously supported by the Qur'ān, for the words used by the Qur'ān are equally capable of being interpreted in a different manner. The word *'rafa'hu'*, in particular, does not exclusively apply to bodily ascension. It also means 'He

exalted him' or 'He raised him up to Himself', which may equally well apply to God having caused him to die a natural death.

Therefore, it may be presumed that, for some reason, the Qur'ān does not clear the mystery which surrounded the end of Jesus. (We are using he term 'mystery' in a purely historical and not a religious sense.) But the Qur'ān denies very firmly and clearly the fact that Jesus died on the cross or that he was raised from the dead on the third day. The Biblical account of the manner in which Jesus met his end and of his resurrection is, in any case, unnatural. It seems that many of the disciples of Jesus who believed him to be the promised Messiah were unable to overcome the feeling of expectancy associated with the idea that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand and that Jesus would bring it into existence. But when Jesus died or disappeared, they still could not overcome the feeling of expectancy and thought that they had actually seen Jesus who, in his resurrection, had invested them with a new life and spirit.

Some of the statements said to have been made by Jesus and recorded in the Gospels, if they are taken to be true, must have induced a feeling that some great event was at hand which would either usher in the Kingdom of Heaven itself or herald its appearance. "But I tell you truly," says Luke, "there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see the Kingdom of God" (Luke , 9: 26-7). And again, "You also must be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke, x2: 40). The passing away of Jesus must have filled his disciples with a sense of vacuum. This vacuum could not last long. They must stir themselves and go about preaching the message of Jesus; but how to do it? Their

spirits were depressed. Something was needed to activise them and it came in the form of a vision or series of visions in which they felt the presence of Jesus. Henceforward, they were full of a new spirit.

In any case, the Qur'ān does not accept that the mere passing away of an individual, however good and great, or his supposed re-appearance for a brief interval before a limited band of his followers for a few minutes, could alter the course of history and interfere with or modify the historical process itself. For a mere person, his ideas and works apart, can have no effect on history. The Qur'ān looks upon history as a continuous process which is influenced by ideas and persons but which does not admit of any transfiguration that is not brought about by a continuous striving after ideals and comes off suddenly, like a bolt from the blue. This has been clearly stated by the Qur'ān in connection with the wars which the Prophet was waging against the non-believers. Referring to the possibility of the Prophet being killed, the Qur'ān says: "And Muḥammad is but a messneger-messengers have already passed away before him. If then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? And the who turns back upon his heels will do no harm at all to Allāh" (III:143). Here it is clear that harm to Allāh really means harm to the cause of Allāh. What the Qur'ān means is that the ideals of Islam will, in any case, be realised whether the Prophet lives or dies, for he had already sown the seeds from which truth will sprout forth in all its fullness. Therefore, what Jesus was in his life and what the did while he was living, and wnat his disciples were to do by way of preaching his ideals, all these mattered very much to the process of history. But that the

supposed appearance of a dead man for a brief period of time could have any effect on history or alter its course is inconceivable, for a person is nothing, his ideas and doings, his will and his strivings apart. This does not mean that disembodied ideas without they agency of a person or persons can move history. But a person, again, apart from what he thinks, how he thinks and in what manner he carries his ideas into effect, is of no significance to history.

It is for this very reason that the Qur'ān denies the divinity of Jesus, for the Divine Being is continuously at work in hisotry. But Jesus came into the world for a definite purpose and having accomplished it, he passed away from it. His ideas move and will always move the world process, for their source was Divine. But in this he enjoyed no special prerogative. He was a man, like all other men, a fact which the Qur'ān repeatedly stresses about Jesus as well as Muḥammad. To make him part of a Divine trio would be tantamount to the claim that he is always at work in history, which is not true of any human being, because that is the exclusive prerogative of the Creator, who shapes human destiny. Any being which has enjoyed humanity even for a moment of time—and Jesus enjoyed it for a number of years—is by the fact of that very enjoyment cut off from the possibility of perpetually influencing the course of history. It is only his message and his example which would outlive him, in proportion to the truth they contain. Let us see, now, what the Qur'ān has to say in regard to the divinity of Jesus.

The first verse which we come across on the sub-ject says, "O people of the Book, exceed not the limits in your religion nor speak anythig about Allāh, but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only a messenger of Allāh

and a mercy from Him. So believe in Allāh and His messeagers. And say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you. Allah is only God. Far be it from His glory to have a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And sufficient is Allah as having charge of affairs. The Messiah disdains not to be a servant of Allāh, nor do the angels who are near to Him. And whoever disdains His service and is proud, He will gather them all together to Himself" (IV: 171-2).

The significance of this passage is that, it establishes the right relationship of Jesus to God repudiating the extreme position adopted by the Jews with regard to Jesus who disparaged and rejected him and the equally extreme stand taken by the Christians who exalted him to the rank of God.

The Qur'ānic expression in the above verse which says that Jesus was "His word which He communicated to Mary" should not be confused with the Christian conception of Jesus as the word of God. Al-Ālūsī explains "His word" as being equivalent to one who guides men, just as the World of God is a guidance for mankind. Al-Jubbā'ī also has understood the expression in the same sense. Another meaning given by al-Ālūsī[17] is that 'word' here means the good news communicated to Mary by the angels that she would give birth to a child. Al-Rāzī[18] takes the stand that 'word' here means command, because Jesus was born by God's command without his mother having conceived him as women normally do just as the creation of Adam took place by the command of of God and not in the ordinary manner in which man usually comes into the world. According to Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī[19] *'kalimah'* or *'word'* is here equivalent to prophecy, in which sense the word is frequently used in the

Qur'ān. Jesus 's called a prophecy because he was born in accordance with glad tidings to her would-be mother from Allāh, just as in a saying the Prophet speaks of himself as "*the prayer of my father Abraham*' the significance being that he appeared in fulfilment of Abraham's prayer.

As regards the word '*Rūḥ*' which is rendered as mercy in the above quoted translation, al-Ālūsī[20] quotes the opinion of al-Jubbā'ī who says that Jesus has been called '*Rūḥ*' (soul of spirit), because men are quickened to life by him, just as they receive life by the soul or the spirit. Al-Ālūsī further says that '*Rūḥ*' here means '*Raḥmah*' which has a wider meaning than merecy, because it includes the idea of grace, compassion, fatherly protection, etc. In this connection a'-Ālūsī refers to the Qur'ānic verse, "Thou will not find a people who believe in Allāh and the latter day loving those who oppose Allāh and His Messenger, even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kinsfolk. These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and strengthened them *with a spirit from Himself*" (LVIII : 22). Here the Qur'ān speaks of God as having strengthened the hearts of sincere Muslims with a spirit from Himself. Jesus was also the Spirit of God in the same sense, because God supported him in the struggle against the unrighteous. Al-Ālūsī gives two other possible meanings to the word '*Rūḥ*' —one is that it may mean the inspiration which Mary received from God that she would have a child and another is that it means a secret, so that Jesus is one of God's secrets.

Al-Rāzī's[21] explanation of the word '*Rūḥ*' used for Jesus is that it is generally used to indicate absolute purity and cleanliness. As Jesus came into the world without Mary having any conjugal relations with a male, the Qur'ān has

used the word '*Rūḥ*' for him to denote the high rank to which God exalted him. Secondly, Jesus caused a new life to spring forth among a people who had become decadent spiritually. Therefore, the Qur'ān used the word '*Rūḥ*' or 'spirit' for Jesus. Al-Rāzī quotes this verse of the Qur'ān in support, "And thus did We reveal to thee an inspired Book by Our command" (XLII : 52).

Discussing the same word Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī[22] points out that even if we take spirit to be the meaning of the word '*Rūḥ*' it does in no way carry Jesus a step beyond the limits of mortality, for of Adam also it has been said, "*I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit*" (XV : 29). In fact, according to the Qur'ān, the spirit of God is breathed into every man. "Then He made him complete and breathed into him of His spirit, and gave you ears and eyes and hearts" (XXXII : 9).

It is clear from the above discussion that while the Qur'ān is anxious to uphold against the Jews the exalted position of Jesus as one of the great Prophets of God, it is equally anxious to repudiate the Christian doctrine of Trinity and the deification of Jesus or his elevation to the rank of the Son of God. Expressions like '*word*' and '*spirit*' used by the Qur'ān have a very different import to that employed by the Christian theologians. This is proved by the fact that after having said all that could be said in favour of Jesus, the Qur'ān makes it clear that Jesus does not disdain to be a servant of Allāh, just as the angels do not hesitate to be His servants. The mention of the angels in this connection signifies, according to al-Rāzī,[23] that if Jesus was told by God of things which could not be known by human reason or foresight, so do the angels know of things which none else

can know and if Jesus possessed some extraordinary powers, the angels too can accomplish many things which are beyond man's power to accomplish. But if, in spite of all this, the angels remain the humble servants and agents of God having no power or knowledge in their own right, Jesus too must stand on the same level.

The Qur'ān reverts to this theme in the verse, "They indeed disbelieve who say : Surely, Allāh — He is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say : Who then could control anything as against Allāh when He wished to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother and all those on the earth? And Allāh's is the kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth and what is between them. He creates what He please. And Allāh is Possessor of Power over all things" (V : 17).[24]

Al-Rāzī[25] says that this verse refers to those who believe in incarnation and think that Jesus was God incarnate. Although the Christians hold that Jesus was the Son of God, the position remains the same as if they believed him to be God, for they maintain that God incarnated Himself in Jesus Christ. Anyhow, the Qur'ān is very insistent on the denial of the divinity of Jesus and maintains, throughout, that as a human being, he was no different from any other man.

The same theme recurs in the verse, "Certainly they disbelieve who say: Allāh, He is the Messiah, son of Mary. And the Messiah said : O Children of Israel, serve Allāh, my Lord and your Lord. Surely whosoever associates (others) with Allāh, Allāh has forbidden to him the Garden and his abode is the fire. And for the wrong-doers there will be no helpers. Certainly they disbelieve who say : Allāh is the third of the three. And there is no God but one God.

And if they desist not from what they say, a painful chastisement will surely befall such of them as disbelieve... the Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; messengers before him had indeed passed away. And his mother was a truthful woman. They both used to eat food" (V : 72-5).

Some commentators are of the opinion, according to al-Rāzī,[26] that the Qur'ān refers to the belief of a certain group among the Christians that God, Jesus and Mary together constitute the three persons of the God-head, while the scholastics report from the Christians that the essence of God is one but it is constituted of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, but all these three are one, just as the sun is a disc but it emits rays of light and gives off heat. The father, according to them, is the Essence, while the Son is the Word and the Holy Ghost is Life. They further hold that the word, which is God's speech, got mixed up with the body of Jesus, just as water may be mixed with wine or with milk.

As regards the reference in the Qur'ān to the fact that Jesus and his mother ate food, it signifies, according to al-Rāzī, one of the two things. First, that every person who is born of a mother must be held to be originated. And any being which is originated must be created and mortal. Secondly, it may refer to the fact that if Jesus and Mary required food to sustain themselves, they stood in need of something other than themselves, but God needs nothing outside Himself and is self-sustaining.

According to Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, the Qur'ān refers in these verses to the Christian doctrine of Trinity. "It should be noted," he says, "that the name of Mary is never mentioned in connection with the doctrine of Trinity.

But as the Christians, specially the Roman Catholics, invested Mary with a divine character, as being the mother of God, the Qur'ān mentions her along with Jesus as being an ordinary mortal."[27]

Mary is more clearly mentioned by the Qur'ān along with Jesus as being the object of Christian worship in the verses, "And when Allāh will say: 'O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say to men, Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allāh'? He will say: 'Glory be to Thee! it was not for me to say what I had no right to (say). If I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my mind and I know not what is in Thy mind. Surely Thou art the Great Knower of the unseen. I said to them naught save as thou didst command me: Serve Allāh, my Lord and your Lord; and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die Thou wast the Watcher over them. And Thou art Witness of all things" V : 116-17).

According to Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, the mention of Mary as a god here does not refer to a Trinity which includes Mary as one of the persons of the Godhead but to the practice of Mariolatory[28] as it was found in the Roman Church. The verse also proves in his opinion that Jesus died a natural death.[29] However, other commentators adopt the usual interpretation that Jesus was speaking of the completion of the term of his life in this world. The translation of Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, "but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wast the Watcher over them" is linguistically sound. The word '*tawaffā*" in Arabic means 'to cause to die', so that '*tawaffaytanī*' would mean 'Thou didst cause me to die'. But the orthodox commentators generally

adopt another meaning wherever this word is used by the Qur'ān in connection with Jesus. *'Tawaffā'* also means 'to complete'. Therefore, they translate *'tawaffaytanī'* as meaning 'thou didst complete my term of life'. They adhere to this translation because of their settled belief in the ascension of Jesus, which is not clearly established anywhere by the words and expressions used in the Qur'ān when it refers to the passing away of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, although the words and expressions used by the Qur'ān do not unambiguously establish that Jesus died a natural death, it would not be incorrect to say that the Qur'ān leans heavily on this side, rather than on the side of the interpretation given by the vast majority of the Muslim commentators.

However, leaving aside the question of the death or ascension of Jesus, the one thing on which the Qur'ān insists in unmistakable terms, is that Jesus Christ was a man like any other man and had nothing of the Divine in him. From the standpoint of a philosopher of history, this is most significant, for the Divine Being is a Timeless Being and a Timeless Being can manifest itself in history only by means of a progressive manifestation spread over the whole of time Were He to manifest Himself once for all—as the Christian claim to the divinity of Jesus clearly implies—history would come to a stop, for history is no more than the manifestation of a Timeless Being and that which is Timeless cannot be exhausted in time. No one person, not even the greatest of prophets, can claim that God had exhausted Himself in his person. But that is what actually the Christian position comes to be.

If it is said that a Timeless Being cannot, similarly, reveal Himself in and through a final revelation, which is

the Muslim position with regard to the Qur'ān, for which finality has been claimed, the reply is that there is a vast difference between a person and the message which he delivers. While the person is subject to physical laws which limit his activity to a specific period of time, the message which he brings may reverberate down the ages. If Shakespeare can be meaningfully read and enjoyed after centuries, if the artistic value of his works is perennial, how much more must be the spiritual value of those eternal truths which the Qur'ān has placed before mankind. The analogy between a piece of poetry and a Divine revelation should not be taken in an absolute sense, for the nature of the two differs widely from each other. But it is a fact that a system of thought and conduct is eternal in the measure in which it embodies and integrates the truths of life under a comprehensive scheme of thought.

NOTES

1. According to Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, the 'Imrān of the Holy Qur'ān is the same as the Amran of the Bible. The descendants of Amran are Moses and Aaron. Moses became the founder of the Israelite Law and Aaron the head of the Israelite priesthood (*op. cit.*, f.n. p. 138).
2. As regards the family of 'Imrān, al-Rāzī says that the commentators have differed as to whether 'Imrān here refers to the father of Moses and Aaron who was Amra, son of Yashar, son of Qahith, son of Lavi (Levi), son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham; or Amran refers to Amran, son of Māthān, father of Mary, who was descended from Solomon and David. If the first opinion is accepted, the family of Amran would mean Moses, Aaron and the prophets who followed them. But if the latter opinion is preferred, then it would mean that God chose Mary, her father and her son for the purpose of propagating His message (al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb,* Cairo, 130 A.H., II:440-41).

3. Salo Wittamayer Bason, *A Social and Religious History of the* ..
New York, 1952, p. 80.

4. Vide St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

"But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a
live shoot. were grafted in their place to share the richness of
olive tree do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, *remen
it is not you that support the root, but the root htat supports you.*
will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted
That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but
stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stan
awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither wil
spare you.... *For if you have been cut from what is by nature a
olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive t.
how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into t
own olive tree"* (Letter of Paul to Romans, 11:17-24).

5. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī writes, "*Imra'at*" means a woman and
a wife. I take *Imra'ate Imrān* as meaning *a woman of the famil
'Imrān.* because the name of a great ancestor is frequently used
indicate the nation which has sprung from him. Thus Kedor sta
from the Ismaelites and Israel for the Israelites. This interpretat
is in perfect accord with what is said in he previous verses as to
election of the descendants of Amran. The general statement
followed by a particular instance. The second instance also rel
to one of the descendants of Amran, viz. John the Baptist, who
also of 'Priestly descent through both parents' (*Bib' Dic.*, Cambri
University Press). Though we know very little regarding the pare
age of Mary, yet the fact that she was, according to the only Tradit
we have about her, devoted to the Temple from three to twelve y
of age, shows clearly that she belonged to the priestly class. Sh
elsewhere called '*the sister of Aaron*' (19:29), and not a sister of Mo
for priesthood was an exclusive pererogative of the descendants
Aaron. In the Semitic languages the words *ab* (father), *umm* (moth
akh (brother, and *ukht* (sister) are used in a broad sense and so do
necessarily imply the close relations of real mother, father, brot
and sister. Thus we have a saying of the Prophet in which he spe
of himself as *the prayer of my father Abraham.* Jesus was also a

ressed as 'son of David,' (Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. p. 412).

6. Al-Suyūṭī, *Durr al-Manthūr*, II:18.
7. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, II:443.
8. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit* II:18.
9. None of the New Testament writers except Luke throws light on the relationship of Mary and Zechari'ah. But Luke's account differs considerably from that of the Qur'ān.

   However, here we are not concerned so much with the prayer of Zechari'ah for a son as with the spiritual rank atatined by Mary in her young age with which Zechari'ah was so greatly impressed.

   Coming to the Qur'ānic account of the birth of Jesus Christ, we find that the Qur'ān begins by clearing Mary of the charges levelled against her by the Jews in whose eyes she was morally suspect.
10. Some commentators have tried to explain the Qur'ānic verses relating to the birth of Jesus Christ on purely naturalistic principles.

   Al-Rāzī has put forward some interesting explanations of the extraordinary manner of the birth of Jesus Christ. He quotes a Tradition going back to Wahāb which says, "When Mary conceived Jesus, with her was Joseph. Both of them served the Mosque (The Temple) and none of their contemporaries could decide who was the more pious and devoted of the two. The first to come to know of Mary's conception was Joseph who was greatly astonished at this strange incident. Whenever he thought of accusing her, he recalled her piety and worshipfulness and that she did not even for a moment remain out of his sight. But when he thought of exonerating her, the thought of her preganncy created a conflict in his mind" (al-Rāzī, *op cit.*, V:35-6)
11. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. p. 432.
12. According to the account given by Matthew, when Jesus was seized by the Jews, the chief priest and the whole council (of the Jews) sought false testimony against him and many false witnesses did come forward. They also asked him to tell them whether he was the Christ, the son of God. Jesus replied "you have said so" (Matthew, 26:56-64). Luke's account makes no mention of any false testimony having been sought

against Jesus or any having been given against him. Mark's account, which otherwise agrees with that of Matthew, states that when Jesus was asked whether he was the Christ, he replied, "I am". John's account contains no mention of any testimony having been sought or made against Jesus (John, 18:19-21).

13. A Tradition relatedby Ibn jarīr and others, on the authority of Ḥasan, says that the word '*mutawaffika*' used by the Qur'ān in the verse (III:54) means, 'I have completed thy term (or period of stay) on the earth'. Another Tradition related on the authority of Ḥasan interprets the same word as meaning, "I am about to send you to sleep'. The Tradition adds that Jesus was taken up to Heaven while he was asleep (al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, II:36).

    Al-Rāzī gives a number of interpretatins of the word "*mutawaffika*" one of which is tht God says to Jesus, 'I will make you like one who is dead' because when God raised him to the Heavens he was to all intent and purposes cut off from the earth, and in this manner became like one who is dead (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, II:465).

14. Commenting on the denial of the Qur'ān that Jesus died on the cross, Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī says, "The words *ṣalabūhu* do not negative Jesus being nailed to the cross; they negative his having expired on the cross as a result of killing (*T.L.*). *A. Ṣalaba-hu* means *he put him to death in a certain well-known manner*" (L.L.).

15. Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, Cairo, al-Munīriyah Press, II:179.

16. Al-Alūsī, VI:10.

17. *Ibid.*, VI:24:5.

18. Al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, III:246, f.n. 652.

19. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. 652.

20. Al-Alūsī, VI:26.

21. Al-Rāzī, III:346.

22. Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, f.n. 653.

23. Al-Rāzī, III:347.

24. Commenting on this verse Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī says, "The meaning here is that Jesus Christ and his mother Mary, and all those who were then on the earth, tasted equally of death; hence Jesus Christ

vas an ordinary human being and not God for if he had been God ie would not have died" (Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. :77).

According to al-Rāzī, the significance of this verse is that it gives esus the same status as his mother and all other human beings in espect of their mortality (al-Rāzī, *op. cit.*, III:382-3).

.l-Rāzī, III:382.

bid., III:434.

Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. 723.

'From this description of Mary being taken for a God by the Chrisians", writes Maulānā Muḥammad 'Alī, "some Christian critics of the ur'ān conclude that the doctrine of the Trinity, according to the ur'ān, consists of three persons—God, Jesus and Mary. But this : an absolutely unwarranted conclusion" (Maulānā Muḥammad Alī, *op. cit.*, f.n. 751).

This verse is a conclusive proof," writes Maulānā Muḥammad Alī, "that Jesus died a natural death, and is not now alive in haven. ere Jesus says that so long as he was among his followers, he was witness of their condition, and he did not find them holding the elief in his Divinity. The logical conclusion of his statement is that ie false doctrine of his Divinity was introduced into the Christian iith *after his death*, after *Thou didst cause me to die*" (*op. cit.*, f.n. '52).

CHAPTER VI

THE QURĀ'NIC CONCEPT OF HISTORY AND SOME MODERN PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY

The Qur'ān does not persent us with a philosophy explicitly worked out, but it has certain denite assumptions without which its statements about history would not cohere, and these we have attempted to delineate in the previous chapters. The modern notion of a philosophy of history implies that history is governed by specific laws to which every society is equally subject. But this is a disputable point. Some writers have doubted the existence of such laws, because if by the term "laws of history" we understand any regular sequence of two terms, such repetitions are to be found in human history. But the real problem has to do with the method of setting up relationships, the construction of the terms and the level on which regularities develop.[1] As regards the question whether there are laws of cultural evolution, laws valid for the evolution of each culture, the fact remains that in practice no law of this sort has been accepted by the historians or by the majority of them. Raymond Aaron[2] criticises the sociologists for demarcating the parts whose transformation he compares, the ground of his criticism being that demarcation is a special form of selection. But selection depends upon the varying interests of the individual sociologist. This fact is equally applicable to the work done by the philosophers of history, because the person

engaged in writing a philosophy of history has to divide the history of mankind into different sectors and compare them with each other. This work of division and comparison naturally depends on his individual viewpoint and interest. Lamprecht, for example, studied national unities; Spengler, cultural unities; Toynbee also sees cultural unities, but "his intelligible fields of study are not the same as Spengler's.... According to historians the similarities between cultures and the originality of each of them vary. Then too, this synthesis of individuality and regular evolution leads to a biological metaphysics. The typical phases in Lamprecht, as in Spengler, correspond to the different periods of the biological process. Besides, the two attempts are different, for Lamprecht defines each historical period by a *dominant* psychology, extended from individual to collective psychology....Spengler, on the contrary, manipulates with a mixture of fancy and intuitive penetration, the discriminatory comparison, which brings out at the same time the parallelism of the phases and the originality of each total history. Is there any need to point out the arbitrary element introduced into these synchronistic structures?"[3]

It will be seen from the above that each philosophy of history is necessarily dependent on the varying interests of the philosopher and the regularities and uniformities stressed by them do not by any means constitute universal and nedcessary laws like those of physics or logics. Most of what has been written by Toynbee or Spengler in regard to the growth and decay of societies can at best be treated as indications of the course that society is expected to follow. But behind these indications which may be often mere symptoms there are more fundamental causes at work, which spring from human nature in its individual and collective

aspects. The Qur'ān bases its concept of history on these manifestations of man's individual and social nature in history. It does not trace the evolution of societies or demarcate the different phases through which they pass. It does not even give us specific laws of cultural growth and decay but points to certain stable facts of human nature in its collective aspects and lays particular stress on those moral and social factors which lead to the corruption of human motives and the disintegration of the corrupt society.

It would be best to make a critical study of some modern philosophies of history. as briefly as possible, and compare them with the Qur'ānic concept of history to bring out their differences. For this purpose, we select Toynbee, Spengler and Karl Marx and will make brief comments on their views of history in the light of the Qur'ānic concept of history to bring out differences.

Toynbee

The main concept in his philosophy of history has been summed up by himself in the following passage:

"Our formula for the growth-progression would be a challenge evoking a successful response generating a fresh challenge evoking another successful response and so on, pending a breakdown ; our formula for the disintegration-progression would be a challenge evoking a successful response, generating another attempt, re-sulting in another failure and so on pending dissolution." "Rout-rally relapse is the form of the disintegration-process that any failure to respond to a challenge sets in train." Further, "the failure of a response results in a retreat in which the ground is lost and discipline is relaxed; but the debacle is neither complete

nor final, because the very danger and disgrace of it call out latent powers of leadership and latent habits of obedience. One some line, at some moment, some officer will temporarily succeed in checking the fugitives' flight and reforming their ranks; the shaken army will then once more face the enemy ... and for a time it will look as though the fortunes of the battle might be retrieved. But these reviving hopes soon prove delusive; for the recovery of the *morale* upon which the leaders are counting in their hope for better success at a second attempt is no more than a fair-weather courage.... Their recovery is more than offset by the shock of finding themselves once again under the fire—and the result is another debacle which is more serious than its predecessor."[4]

One of the basic ideas in Toynbee's philosophy is the role played by the creative leadership. "In any society," he says, "the creative personalites are always in a minority and the action of the genius upon common people operates through a kind of social drill arousing among the rank and file the faculty of imitation. Thus, the uncreative majority is able to achieve many things by the simple habit of imitating the lead of the creative minority rather than by exercising its own initiative,"[5]

Touching upon the difference between a growing society and a disintegrating society, Toynbee points out that the difference between a society when it is growing and when it is disintegrating is not the difference between creativity and the absence of it. "For, while it is true that one of the symptoms of social breakdown and causes of social schism is the degeneration of a minority that has been able to take the lead in virtue of being creative into a minority that attempts to retain the leàd by sheer physical domination, we

have also seen that the secession of the proletariat—which is the answer that the dominant minority evokes from the *members of the society whom it shuts out from ts now closed* and privileged circle—is achieved under the leadership of creative personalities for whose activity there is now no scope except in the organisation of opposition to the incubus of uncreative powers that be. Thus the change from social growth to social disintegration is not accompanied—either as cause or as effect—by an exteinction of the creative spark in the souls of individuals or by a change from creative to uncreative leadership. Creative personalities continue to arise....All that happens is that they now find themselves compelled to do their work frpm a new *locus standi* in a society which, in breaking down, has been rent by a schism."[6]

The creative leader's task in a growing civilization is, according to Toynbee, to play the role of a conqueror who replies to a challenge with a victorious response. But in a disintegrating civilization the same creator is called upon to play the part of a saviour who comes to the rescue of a society that has failed to respond "because the challenge has worsted a minority that has ceased to be creative and that has sunk into being merely dominant."[7]

These saviours who arise from the internal proletariat of a disintegrating civilization may adopt four alternative ways[8] of rescuing their society. The first of these, according to Toynbee, who try to seek refuge in a distant past, are the 'Archaists'. The second type of saviour is the 'Futurist who builds an imaginative picture of the Future and strives to save his society from its present condition by leading it towards the imagined future. The third type of saviour escapes from the present by means of Detachment. Along this path,

says Toynbee, he will present himself as a philosopher taking cover behind the mask of a king. The fourth and last type of saviour follows the path of transfiguration as a god incarnate in a man. Here Toynbee seems to have in mind the figure of Jesus Christ as it has been drawn by the writers of the four Gospels.

In the final analysis, Toynbee declares that the saviour who employs the sword is bound to meet with disappointment. Toynbee lays down as an inexorable law of life the Biblical maxim that 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,' and adds that the swordsman's belief in a conclusive victory is an illusion.[9]

"The man of violence cannot both genuinely repent of his violence and permanently profit by it. The law of *Karma* is not evaded so easily as that. The saviour with the sword may perhaps build a house upon the sand but not upon the rock.... This ultimate failure of all attempts to win salvation with the sword is not only proclaimed in poetry and myth and legend; it is also demonstrated in history; for 'the iniquity of the fathers who have had recourse to the sword is visited' upon the children unto the third and fourth generation."[10]

This is a very brief presentation of the leading ideas of Toynbee's philosophy of history. It is clear that while Toynbee points to certain recurring historical phenomeana as they arise in the process of the growth and distintegration of civilizations, he does not offer any ultimate explanation of the fact why civiilzations grow and decay and what foctors help or retard the process of this growth and decay. For example, the question arisesss to who sends the challenge, and to what end. Toynbee answers that it is God Who gives

the challenge that He may evoke a free and creative response so as to draw men nearer to their own perfection and to Himself, so that history is moving from God, its source to God, its goal.[11]

"In thus giving us his new version of a theme which has passed from Neo-Platonism through Erigena into Christian thought, Toynbee is—as he is himself aware—making a radical change in his whole system of thought. Religion can no longer be regarded as a human response to a social challenge. Its main purpose can no longer be to condole the death or help in the birth of civilizations....Religion cannot be explained in terms of civilization; on the contrary, civilizations themselves exist only in order to produce religions."[12] Moreover, this way of looking at the relationship of religion and civilization ignores the important fact that the perfection which religion seeks to create is the perfection of the individual through society. The individual and the society are both necessary for the development of each other and, therefore, religion recognises the due importance of both. But it does not directly concentrate on the task of creating a civilization, though civilization is influenced in varying degrees by the teachings of religion depending on its depth and scope. Civilization is not necessary to religion, although religions might and have given birth to civilizations. This shows that civilization is not the primary object of Divine attention. To explain religion as the outcome of the civilizational process is to miss the whole truth of religion. Further, it should not be forgotten that civilizations are not religiously oriented They may create some kind of moral elevation but that elevation may be quite different from the spiritual elevation that religion seeks to produce. No one can deny that the Greeks and the Romans had a certain ideal of character and culture

and that for relatively short periods in their history, they successfully approximated to that ideal and produced men of sterling qualities, but the tyoe of character which they succeeded in building up had little in common with that of the Jews under Moses, David and Solomon, of the Christians under Jesus Christ, St. Paul and other early leaders of Christianity or of the Muslims under the Prophet of Islam and his immediate Successors. The Greeks and the Romans had undeniably an ethics of their own but that ethics bears no relation to the spirituality which a Moses, Jesus Christ or a Muḥammad had before him as the ideal of human perfection.

If we accept for the time being Toynbee's theory of challenge and response, still the theory dos not explain why civilizations in their process of growth make a successful response to the challenges presented to them and why in a period of disintegration the same civilization fails to meet the challenges. Toynbee offers no explanation for this in terms of the beliefs and the institutions on which civilizations are based which enable a particular civilization to face the chanllenges successfully. He merely quotes the facts of history to show how different civilizations react in the different stages of their development to the challenges presented to them.

It is difficult to dispute Toynbee's thesis that it is the creative leadership in a civiliation which keeps it going and that this creative leadership is always in a minority. But this, again does not explain much for the question remains whether the emergence of creative leadership is just an accident of history or the outcome of certain socio-moral balues which society takes care to inculcate in and enforce upon its members, and whether men's attitude to life and the belief they hold in respect of their ultimate destiny has any hing to do with

social creativity. Somilarly, the loss of creativity in what Toynbee calls the "Dominant Minority" needs some explanation. Here we find the Qur'ānic concept of history on a much more solid ground. It appears that the Dominant Minority, having been in enjoyment of power for a long time and having been surrounded with all the comforts and amenities of life and the outward respect of those over whom it rules, loses its spiritual equilibrium. Its attitude towards life and the moral values which brought it to strength and power undergo a subtle and impreceptible change. It begins to attach more value to things that immediately pander to its self-pride, ambition and pleasure, overlooking the remoter but more real interests that mould its destiny. The outward respect that it commands is far more pleasing to it than the genuine goodwill of the people. Gradually, it loses regard for truth, because its own soul gets corrupted with untruth. It is both unable and unwilling to take stock of its failings and frailties and becomes resentful of any attempt on the part of others to correct its ways or stop it from adopting measures detrimental to its own real interests and the interests of the majority.

It is this mental attitude that is responsible for the gradual loss of creativeness in the Dominant majority, for creativeness in any man or group of men is conditioned by the presence of a defnite attitude to life which prefers the things of the spirit over the material accompaniments of social existence. A person who depends exclusively for his feeling of self-respect on the attitude of other persons, their approval and disapproval and their moral estimate of him, has much less chance of being creative, because his attention will be devoted mostly to the winning of social approval

rather than to the maximum utilisation of his creative abilities. The creative man is always possessed of an inward certainty as to the moral, religious or artistic worth of his endeavours and, therefore, rises abov the passive process of adjusting himself to the standards of his society. It is to this aspect of creativity that the Qur'ān refers in verse V : 57 where it says that God will bring up a nation (of true Muslims) which will not fear the reproaches of other people. This means that it will do what it thinks to be right, irrespective of social opinion.

It is also a point worth consideration that what Toynbee calls creativeness amounts, in effect, to the ability and willingness of human beings to contribute to the good of society in some form or the other, to give one's best in the service of one's fellowmen, to be 'other-regarding' rather than 'self-regarding'; in fact, to become the very opposite of the acquisitive, grabbing type of man who stands at the apex of a decaying society. Such men naturally perfer their inward satisfaction to any material reward, so long as they can ensure their survival and maintain their creativity. Therefore, an explanation in terms of the loss of creative ability is really no explanation unless we are also told what kind of beliefs and standards of moral evaluation sustain the creative force in human beings and what kinds of beliefs and standards of ethical judgment tend to enfeeble human creativity. The Qur'ānic concept of history is, from this point of view, superior to any of the modern philosophies of history, for the Qur'ān has touched upon all these points in the stories of the Prophet's dealings with the chieftains of their people. For example, in the discussion which took place between Noah and his chieftains, Noah replies to the objections of the latter saying, "And I say not to you that I have the treasures of Allāh;

and I know not the Unseen; nor do I say that I am angel. Nor do I say about those whom your eyes scorn that Allāh will not grant them (any good — Allāh knows what is in their souls—for then indeed I should be of the wrong-doers" (XI : 31).

This passage outlines the respective viewpoints and standards of judgment of Noah and his opponents. Noah's attitude is one of humility coupled with faith in the truth of his message, while his oponents would not believe in any spiritual leader who does not make tall claims. They have no eye on the content of the message itself but judge the Prophet from the social standing of his followers whom they despise because of their poverty. They further think that God does not vouchasfe His belssings to those who seem to constitute in their eyes the lower strata of society. On the other hand, Noah says that the blessings of God are not the monopoly of any particular class and people and should not be judged by their social status but by their beliefs and conduct. This shows that Noah and his followers are under the influence of a different set of moral values from those of their opponents whose moral standrds are not calculated to foster creativity.

The same point is illustrated by the struggle between the Prophet Shu'ayb and his people. The Qur'ān has narrated the course of this struggle. In the course of its narration, the Qur'ān gives us a brief speech of the Prophet Shu'ayb which he made to his people and which throws light on their respective spiritual attitudes and their approach to the problems of life. "And O my people! give full measure and weight justly, and defraud not men of their things, and act

not corruptlly in the land making mischief. What remains with Allāh is better for you, if you are believers... They said : O Shu'ayb ! does they prayer enjoin thee that we should forsake what our fathers worshipped or that we should not do what we please with regard to our property ? ... He said: O my people ! see you if I have a clear proof from my Lord.... I desire not to act in opposition to you, in that which I forbid you. I desire nothing but reform, so far as I am able. And with none but Allāh is the direction if my affair to a right issue. In Him I trust and to Him I turn" (XI : 85-8).

This passage throws light on the factors which were undermining the creativity of the people from whom the Prophet Shu'ayb sprang. Morally they were corrupt and were also given to profiteering at the expense of their fellow countrymen. Instead of doing constructive work they spread mischief in the land. They were not content with what was left to them after they had given their due to the people with whom they had business dealings. They wanted to give less than was due, so that they might earn more. Their idea of property was at fault. They could not believe that the possession of property and the exercise of proprietary rights were con ditioned by considerations of social welfare. Finally, they had no idea of God and of their accountability to Him and this made them lalwless and indisciplined. Since creativity is conditioned by the spiritual attitudes of people and their standards of moral judgement, it is clear that the Qur'ān has far more to say about the factors which foster creativity. On the other hand, Toynbee mentions creativity and the absence of creativity without telling us what moral qualities and spiritual attitudes make people creative or result in the loss of creativity.

Toynbee's categorisation of the types of would-be saviour in a disintegrating society leaves much to be desired. Thus the saviours who are called by him 'Archaists' are not, as he maintains, men who try to lead their society backward into a distant past with no eye on the realities of the present. Such pure revivalism is unimaginable in any society. It is not archaism to derive inspiration from one's past, if that past offers elements for the reconstruction of society which are ethically and rationally more well grounded. No leader who has the slightest idea of the nature of the historical process can imagine that the past can be revived in its entirety. The Russian revolutionaries cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be classed with the Archaists, but the agricultural system which they built up after the Communist revolution contains reconstituted elements of the past, for Russian agriculture even in the Tasrist days had a collective bias. Politically, also the Russian Communist dictatorship continues the tradition of the monarchical system under which the people lived during the regime of the Tsars, though it is not denied that in its details and manner of operation the Communist system is different from the system of the Tsars. Again, speaking of the Turkish revolution ushered in by Mustafa Kamal, Toynbee characterises it both as Archaistic, in so far as it seeks to revive pre-Islamic Turkish language and Futuristic in so far it looks to the Western civilization as its model.[13] It is difficult to believe that Mustafa Kamal could both be an Archaist as well as a Futurist at one and the same time. The fact was that he was neither an Archaist nor a Futurist, for he did not have any respect for the past and had hardly any idea of the future in his mind. He worshipped the present and sought the easiest way out of his difficulties by adopting a civilization which he found ready-made and which enabled him to tide

over his immediate difficulties.

Toynbee's unqualified statement that the savriour who employs the sword is doomed to failure belies all the facts of history. His quotation of the Biblical maxim, "All that take the sword shall perish by the sword" does not take into account the remark of Jesus, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth ; I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10 : 34). It is true, however, that Jesus did not employ physical force in the service of his ideals and that for this and many other reasons the Christian mind has become biased in favour of the doctrine stated by Toynbee that employment of force has achieved little in history. However, this thesis is highly controversial. The sword has very often changed the course of history specially where it has been used in the service of ideas. The fact that at some future date the changes effected by one swordsman may be and have been undone by another means nothing, for history is never static. Changes do and will always take place in man's collective life, sword or no sword. But no change, by whatever means effected, is potent enough to wipe out all that has been achieved in the past. There is no total and irrevocable revolution in life. The greatest of historical revolutions leaves many things unchanged and preserves the values of the past in some measure. The ultimate fate of all great ideas has been decided by the sword. Physical force, when pressed into the service of creative ideas, is the mightiest agency of historical change and such changes produce lasting effects, which no future revolution can wipe out. Toynbee's glorification of the 'Saviour' who is a God-incarnate is little else but the defence of Christianity, because Jesus Christ disliked to employ force even in the defence of his ideology. What

Toynbee ignores is that Jesus' abstention from the use of force was necessitated by the exigencies of his time. In more favourable circumstances he might have led a movement of resistance against the Roman authorities in Palesitne.

Oswald Spengler

The most significant remark made by Oswald Spengler with regard to the philosophy of history is that "Real history is heavy with fate but free of laws. One can divine the future (there is, indeed, a certain insight that can penetrate its secrets deeply) but one cannot reckon it. The physiognomic flair which enables one to read a whole life in a face or to sum up whole peoples from the picture of an epoch and to do so without deliberate effort or "system"—is utterly remote from all "cause and effect".[14] Further, Spengler declares that "the Destiny idea dominates the whole world-picture of history, while causality, which is the existence-mode of *objects* and stamps out of the world of sensation a set of well-distinguished and well-defined *things, propertis* nad *relations,* dominates and penetrates, as the form of the understanding, the Nature-world that is the understanding's 'alterego".[15]

In these two passages, Spengler has expressed a fundamental truth about history, namely, that it is dominated by the Destiny idea, but we would not exclude the operation of causality from history as rigidly as it has been excluded by Spengler. The causal factors remain at work in history. In the sphere of moral conduct specially, the chain of cause and effect is far more effective. What we deny, however, is that the law of causality in the sphere of human conduct is either rigid or irreversible, so that the effects of a particular type of conduct cannot be wiped off or overcome by self-re-

form and self-correction. This fact has been emphasized by the Qur'ān in the verses "Surely, Allāh changes not the condition of a people, until they change their own condition" (XIII: 11) and "Surely good deeds take away evil deeds" (XI : 114). The first of these verses negates the idea of determinism and constitutes and assertion of man's freewill. It is a declaration that man is not the prisoner of an inexorable law of causality. The Qur'ān does not deny that causality exists in the sphere of human conduct and that certain consequences follow from certain acts. On the other hand, every act has its corresponding effect. But man has in himself the power to take to a fresh course of action, which might overcome the effects of previous conduct, if it is followed with vigour and determination. The cause-effect chain can be reversed by new decisions followed by a fresh series of acts. The second verse quoted above shows that the Qur'ān holds that the effects of human actions in the field of social or moral conduct can be nullified and overcome by antagonistic acts which might cancel or set at nought the consequences of the previous acts, so that the law of causality in the sphere of human morality is not a rigidly mechanical law. Therefore, in spite of its belief in causality, Islam is in agreement with the view of Spengler that "in the Destiny idea the soul reveals its world-longing, its desire to rise into the light, to acccomplish and actualize its vocation."[16] *It is absolutely true that once a nation begins to believe that it has a mission and vocation to fulfil, or in other words, once it believes in its destiny, it can break through the law of causality and instead of becoming its prisoner it can subject this law to the demands and requirements of its own mission turning it into a vehicle and a means for the fulfilment of its ends.*

However, there is one aspect of the Destiny idea in Spengler, with which the Qur'ânic concept of life cannot possibly agree. "Each culture," writes Spengler, "must necessarily possess its own Destiny-idea. Indeed, this conclusion is implicit form the first in the feeling that every great culture is nothing but the actualising and from of a single, singularly constituted (*einzigaritg*) soul. And what cannot be felt by one set of men exactly as it is felt by another (since the life of each is the expression of the idea *proper* to himself) and still less transcribed, what is named by us 'Conjecture,'... 'accident', 'providence' or Fate by classical men 'Nemesis,' 'Ananke,' 'Tycha', or 'Fatum', by the Arab 'Kismat,' by everyone is some way of his own, is just that of which each unique and unreproduceable soul-consitution, quite clear to those who share in it is a rendering."[17]

Now, if every culture actualises a single and singularly constituted soul, this would mean that any attempt to trace out the regularities and uniformities present in diverse cultures is foredoomed to failure, and no principles can be formulated with the object of explaining the growth and decline of the different cultural entities that we come across in history. But an even more fatal objection to this line of thought is that it constitutes the denial of human unity, and the presence of a common soul among mankind, because the soul of every individual belonging to a particular culture being singularly constituted is bound to defy and attempt to explain human actions from common psychological motives. It is undeniable, however, that the springs of humans activity are the same for all men, irrespective of the age, period, culture or civilization to which they belong. There is a common soul running through the entire mass of human

beings. The Qur'ān has made this quite clear in the verse, "O people, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being" (IV : 1).

This way of thinking leads Spengler eventually to assert the absolute relativity of all truth. "Truths are truths only" he writes, "in relation to a particular mankind. Thus, my own philosophy is able tc express and reflect only the Western (as distinct from the classical, Indian or other) soul and that soul only in its present civilized phase by which its conception of the world, its practical range and its sphere of effect are specified".[18] On this basis there seems little validity in whatever Spengler has written about the Christian, Islamic or Indian culture. Another person belonging to a non-Western culture or to a different phase of the Western culture may very probably view the Christian, Islamic and Indian cultures from a completely different angle and can claim equal validity for the conclusions he might reach. There remains, therefore, no basis for any measure of agreement in regard to the way in which the historical process works itself out.

The most interesting part of Spengler's thesis is that wherein he makes a distinction between culture and civilization. "Every culture," he writes, "has its own civilization. ...The civilization is the inevitable destiny of the culture... civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectul age and the stone-built petrifying world-city following mother earth, and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end; irrevocable, yet by internal neces-

sity reached again and again. So, for the first time we are enabled to un-derstand the Romans as the *successors* of the Greeks, and light is projected into the deepest secrets of the late classical period. What, but this, can be the meaning of the fact—which can only be disputed by vain phrases— that the Romans were barbarians who did not *precede* but closed a great development? Unspiritual, unphilosophical, devoid of art, clannish to the point of brutality, aiming relentlessly at tangible successes, they stand between Hellenic culture and nothingness.... In a word, Greek *soul* Roman *intellect;* and this antithesis is the differentia between culture and civilization. Nor is it only to classical that it applies. Again and again there appears this type of strong-minded, completely non-metaphysical man, and in the hands of this type lies the intellectual and material destiny of each and every 'late' period."[19]

Explaining the characteristics of this late period, the stage at which culture disappears and civilization takes its place, Spengler makes some pregnant remarks, which are in agreement with the Qur'ānic concept of history. "The two basic ideas of every civilization," he writes, " ...bring up a wholly new form-problem of history, the very problem that we are living through today with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a *city*, a *point*, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city-dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the country-gentleman. This is a very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end... culture-cities like Florence, Norem-

berg, Salamanca, Bruges and Prag, have become provincial towns and fight inwardly a lost battle against world-cities. The world-city means cosmopolitanism in place of 'home', cold matter-of-fact in place of reverence for tradition, scientific irreligion as a fossil, representative of the older religion of the heart, 'Society' in place of the state, natural instead of hard-earned right. It was in the conception of money as an inorganic and abstract magnitude, entirely disconnected from the notion of the fruitful earth and the primitive values, that the Romans had the advantage of the Greeks."[20]

Although the Qur'ān does not mention cultures and civilizations in the manner of Spengler,the characteristic qualities of the Civilization period — the late period ,as Spengler calls it, are fairly discernible in the Qur'ān's description of disintegrating societies. For example, when Spengler says that in the civilization period the world-city replaces culture-towns and in this city there comes to the surface a new type of nomad, homeless, traditionless and without religion, he is really referring to the hedonistic type of living that characterises the life of big cities. The people forget their values and traditions because pleasure-seeking becomes the sole object of their lives and for this very reason there is a falling away from religion, a sort of dread of and scepticism towards all manifestations of the religious feeling, because so long as religious consciousness is alive in man, it does not allow him freedom to do as he pleases. Religion brings with it self-imposed restrictions and obligations but those who want to live free and easy lives abhor the very idea of such restrictions and obligations. It may be remarked by way of objection to our thesis that there is no society which does not have its laws and regulations and that social living is impossible without some kinds of restrictions. This is true,

but what is forgotten is that laws imposed from without and restrictions enforced by the State which do not command the inward assent of the individual's conscience and evoke no sympathetic response from him are niether effective nor salutary. Laws may be good and bad, wholesome or defective, but the laws developing out of a religious consciousness since they have their source in the inner depths of the spirit are invariably effective. Two other qualities ascribed by Spengler to the cosmopolitan city-dweller, namely, his cleverness and unfruitfulness spring from the self-same source. He is obliged to be secretive and untrustworthy because his hedonistic way of living compels him to resort to all kinds of shifts', and tricks and he is bound to be unfruitful because his way of life makes him acquisitive. If he thinks of contributing to the good of his fellow-beings, that would make a demand on his time, energy, or purse, which he would prefer to utilise for the promotion of his own pleasures rather than for the happiness of others. Thus, we come back to the quality which the Qur'ān characterises as *itrāf*, namely love of ease and comfort and the desire to get the utmost pleasure out of life. All that Spengler says about the dweller of the world-city has been more succinctly described by the Qur'ān in all those verses which condemn the *mutrafīn* (i.e. those who love ease, comforts and pleasures).

It is true that the cities are in a sense more creative than the rural areas, because it is in them that there flourish arts, industry and education. What happens, however, is that in a declining civilization, this creativity becomes perverted and serves to produce more corruption. Education becomes merely a means of gaining lucrative employment. It does not serve to produce men of wide culture. Industry is geared to the production of luxury goods and art, instead

of arousing emotions of sublimity and reverential awe towards the beauty of creation, stirs up carnal emotions. Therefore, the creativity of city life in a declining culture is, by and large, spurious.

This thesis is further supported by the following remarks of Spengler with regard to culture and art:

"To the Culture belong gymnastics, the tournament, the agon, and to the civilization belongs sport. This is the true distinction between the Hellenic palaestra and the Roman circus. Art itself becomes sport (hence the phrase 'art for art's sake')."[21]

It is clear that whatever the technical distinction between sports and tournament, there are two ways of looking at all games which demand some kind of physical exercise. First, that they are mainly directed to the strengthening of of men's physical power and that any entertainment that they might provide to them and to the onlookers is merely incidental. The second way of looking at such things is that their main object is to provide entertainment and excite pleasure and whatever may be gained through them by way of physical strength and the increased capacity for endurance is merely accidental or a matter of secondary importance. This second attitude towards games and sports is nothing but a kind of disguised hedonism, which marks the life of a society going through the process of decay. It is the same quality which the Qur'ān characterises as *Itrāf.*

According to Spengler, the last stage of every culture— the civilization stage — is marked by an expansionist and Imperialist urge. "Here then I lay down," says Spengler, "that *Imperialism,* of which petrifacts such as the Egyptian

empire, the Roman, the Chinese, the Indian may continue to exist for hundreds and thousands of years—dead bodies, amorphous and dispirited masses of men, scrap-material from a great history — is to be taken as the typical symbol of the passing away. Imperialism is Civilization unadulterated. In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set. The energy of the cultural-man is directed inwards, that of civilization man outwards.... The expansive tendency is a doom, something deamonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late-mankind of the world-city stage, willy-nilly, aware or unaware. Life is the process of effecting possibilities, and for the brain-man there are only extensive possibilities."[22]

Spengler fails to distinguish between expansionism and imperialism. Every expansionism is not necessarily imperialistic. It is in the nature of a vigorous culture to expand outward. That which does not expand must, of necessity, contract and fade out. Even imperialism in its initial states does not signify decadence. Only when it has reached the point of gathering the fruits of its conquests that it takes the road to decadence, and at this stage its sole concern is to preserve its gains. But this very urge to preserve itself shows that it has reached its farthest limits and spent out its vitality. When Spengler says that imperialism is civilization unadulterated and "in this pehnomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set"[23], he is speaking of an epoch of European history when Western Imperialism had reached its saturation point. Only Germany, among the major countries of Western Europe, remained unsatisfied and could find no room for expnasion. However, there is this difference between cultural expansionism and imperial-

ism that the latter feeds itself on war and violence as the sole means of securing its ends, while the former relies more on propagating its value-system and if such propagation generates war or forces resort to violence, cultural expansionism does not fight shy of it. Further, a culture rests upon ideas, while imperialism rests on brute force. Therefore, all wars of expansion are not imperialistic. This is particularly true of the wars undertaken to safeguard and defend a set of values, for it is always men and nations devoid of a virile system of ideas who first use physical force against the representatives of living and powerful idea. The latter employ force initially in their defence but once the fight is on, it becomes a fight to the finish.

The wars of early Islam leading to the conquest of Syria and Persia and the wars that followed in the wake of the French Revolution were purely ideological in which force was used by the ideological group as a purely defensive measure in the first instance, because the other party was on the point of taking the offensive.

Karl Marx

The main difference between the Qur'ānic concept of history and the Marxist concept is that the latter regards history as foreordained by a logic of its own. History, according to Marx, is not open to different possibilities which can be actualised only by human decisions involving will and reason. On the other hand, there is an inner logic which governs the process of historical development. The human decisions, in the Maxrist view, are not made by choice and free-will since men are largely, if not wholly, governed by class interests. Therefore, their major decisions—those which

concern the life of the community — are the inevitable outcome of their class consciousness. This is the same idea that is expressed by Hegel in the phrase 'the cunning of reason'. It is really a mode of saying that the realm of the unconscious — the realm of blind passions — is the dominant force in human affairs The irrational element in human nature completely overshadows the rational element. The Qur'ān does not accept this theory, since it believes that men are able to perceive their 'real interests' as against those that are spurious and illusory. It does not deny that men have their interests and that these partly govern their life but it believes at the same time that men, specially those gifted with a deeper perception and higher morality, can overcome the pull exerted over them by their interests. "Those of His servants only who are possessed of knowledge fear Allāh" (XXXV : 28); it is by the hands of these God-fearing men, the men gifted with perception and knowledge, men who know their 'real' interests and those of their fellow-men, that the destiny of nations and mankind is shaped and it is their decisions that are of vital importance for history.

This leads directly to the denial of the doctrine of proletarianism propounded by Marx, namely, that the proletarian majority will shape the course of history in future and that all previous movements in history were only minority movements; only this last movement which will usher in the Communist world-order will be the majority movement. The Qur'ānic concept in this respect approximates to Toynbee's concept of the creative minority, for it is only a minority of purposeful and thinking persons that form the leadership of any movement — even of the proletarian movement under Communism. The vast majority of people merely follows the lead given by the minority.

The Qur'ān also rejects the Messianism latent in the Marxist philosophy of history. Referring to this Messianism, Karl Lowith says, "It is therefore not by chance that the 'last' antagonism between the two hostile camps of *bourgeoisie* and proletariat corresponds to the Jewish-Christian belief in a final fight between Christ and Antichrist in the last epoch of history, that the task of the prolectariat corresponds to the world-historical mission of the chosen people, that the redemptive and universal function of the most degraded class is conceived of on the religious pattern of Cross and Resurrection, that the ultimate transformation of the realm of necessity into realm of freedom corresponds to the transformation of the *Civitas Terrena* into a *Civitas Dei*, and that the whole process of history as outlined in the *Communist Manifesto* corresponds to the general scheme of the Jewish-Christian interpretation of history as a Providential advance towards a final goal which is meaningful. Historical materialism is essentially, though secretly, a history of fulfilment and salvation in terms of social economy."[24]

This idea of the inevitability of the historical process leading to the fulfilment of a pre-destined end finds no counterpart in the Qur'ān. It is true that the Qur'ān has promised victory to the Prophet of Islam over his opponents as in the verse, "He it is Who sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions" (XLVIII : 28). But here the victory promised is clearly the victory of Islam in Arabia over the polytheists, the Jews and the Christians and the promise was fulfilled in the lifetime of the Prophet. Although some commentators have interpreted the promise in a wider sense as including the general victory of Islam over the whole world, the context of the verse

does not warrant such an interpretation. The Qur'ân does, however, extend an assurance to believers that if they stick to the path of faith and righteousness, God will place them in a position of power. "Allāh has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will surely make them rulers in the earth as He made those before them rulers (in the earth), and that He will surely establish for them their religion, which He has chosen for them, and that He will surely give them security in exchange after their fear" (XXIV 55). The assurance given here, however, is not unconditional, because it is promised only to those who do good (to mankind). If the Muslims fail to meet the requirements laid down by the Qur'ân, they might fail to secure the power and dominion promised by the Qur'ân. However, the Qur'ān does contain the assurance that the mission of Islam will continue to prosper throughout history, and if a particular group or generation of Muslims fail to do their duty by Islam, God will raise up a fresh group of Muslims more devoted to their cause. "O you who believe, should any of you turn back from his religion, then Allāh will bring a people, whom He loves and who love Him, humble towards believers, mightly against the disbelievers, striving hard in Allāh's way and not fearing the censure of any censurer" (V : 54). This means that the fight for Islam will continue in all periods of history. The success of Islam, therefore, is not guaranteed by the process of history. The Qur'ān guarantees the victory to Islam on other grounds "And say : The Truth has come and falsehood vanished. Surely falsehood is ever bound to vanish" (XVII : 81). Islam, being truth, is bound to prevail over untruth. Its victory, therefore, is a moral and not an historical necessity , except in so far as moral necessity is bound to imfluence the historical process, which is largely governed by the moral nature

of man. It is because the nature of man is moral, it is because man loves truth of thinking as well as truth of living that Islam is bound to prevail over antagonistic forces. Islam is the only system of life that meets to the highest degree this requirement of man's moral nature and for this same reason the Qur'ān has described it as the religion of nature, since it accords so well and so completely with the moral and natural urges lodged in man. "So set thy face for religion, being upright, the nature made by Allāh in which He has created men. There is no altering Allāh's creation. That is the right religion" (XXX : 30).

Here we touch upon a fundamental difference between Marxism and Islam, for according to Marxism, man's nature is not something fixed and given for all time. In the Marxist theory man is the creation of the social system within which he lives, moves and works.

Under Communism, it is claimed by the Marxist, man's nature will undergo a total transformation so that all his selfish propensities will be completely eradicated. Men are greedy, jealous and power-loving, it is maintained, not because these qualities are ingrained in human nature, but because the existing social system creates these qualities in men. In actual fact there is no such thing as a stable human nature. What is called the 'nature of man' is just a a reflection of the socio-economic system which envelops the human mind.

The Marxist concept of human nature is belied by the facts of history. From time immemorial men have lived under widely different political and economic systems. There have been monarchies, oligarchies, democracies of various

types and dictatorships of different varieties. Men have also lived under the economic system based on slavery and serfdom, they have witnessed the rise and decay of fedualism in its different forms. They have passed their lives under capitalistic and socialistic economies: yet under all these socio-political conditions , their behaviour has shown a fair amount of uniformity, for they have fought and quarrelled with each other, they have competed for positions of power and strength, they have loved and hated each other, they have displayed qualities of selfishness as well as of selflessness, they have cooperated for righteous as well as for unrighteous ends, they have succumbed to the evils of greed and love of sensual pleasures and have been worshippers of a matter-of-fact realism, while sometimes they have climbed the highest peaks of idealism. This uniformity of human nature may be observed through all the different periods of history and under the varying political and economic systems mentioned above. If men could change their inmost nature with every change in their social system, history would become completely unintelligible That there is good as well as evil in human nature cannot be denied, that by teaching, persuasion, personal example and the creation of healthy socio-political systems, the good in man can be brought out and utilised to the maximum, none can gainsay; but that the latent forces of greed, jealousy, unhealthy ambition for power and love of sensual pleasures will never re-assert themselves is a claim too big for any reformer or revolutionary to make. No religious, social, political or economic reform can prevent the possibiilty of recrudescence of the daemonic forces in man. To keep the latter under control would need eternal vigilance and require a continual fight against the evil forces in human nature. This is an unalterable fact of history which no socio-economic

reconstruction can or ought to ignore. It is true that the good in man preponderates over evil but to ensure that the good shall not remain suppressed and that the evil shall not be allowed to reign unchecked would require special and repeated efforts.

The Qur'ānic concept of history is based on a deep understanding of human nature while Marxism dismisses the entire problem of man's nature as being of little relevance to the process of history. For this reason the view of history as presented in the pages of the Qur'ān is far more true to the facts of life. The Qur'ān does not propound any set of laws which may be said to govern the historical process. It only shows that certain traits of human nature express themselves in the history of all decaying societies, while other traits of human nature exhibit themselves in the history of growing societies. At the same time the Qur'ān tells us through the mouths of the Prophets what kind of moral teachings, beliefs and socio-economic values, tangibly incorporated in laws, can arrest the process of social decay and lead a community to material as well as spiritual 'power.

Since we have already discussed all these matters in the preceding chapters we shall not deal with them again. Our final conclusion is that the Qur'ān does not give us a whole philosophy of history supported by a large array of historical facts but an insight into those facts of human nature in so far as they affect the lives of human beings in their collectivity which can make or mar the destiny of peoples.

NOTES

1. Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, London, 1961, pp. 238-9.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

4. Aronold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, London, 1956, VI: 281
5. *Ibid.*, VI:175-6.
6. *Ibid.*, VI:176.
7. *Ibid.*,VI:177.
8. *Ibid.*, VI:178.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, VI:180-1.
11. Albert Hourani, *A Vision of History*, Beirut, 1961, p. 21.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Arnold Toynbee, *op. cit.*, VI:68, 102.
14. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, tr. by C.F. Atkinson, London, 1954, p. 118.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-2.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-2.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.
23. *Ibid.*,.
24. Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago, 1958, pp. 44-5.

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